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A.N. Dhar

Foreword by
Ronald Tamplin

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FOREWORD

This is a welcome book. It does two things, both of them important. First, it is a sane and balanced addition to the growing literature drawing together the endeavours of poetry and of religious mysticism to see how far they are related or parallel one another. Secondly, it centres its case on two Victorian poets whose fate is to be thought of, in barren Histories of Literature, as irretrievably minor. Minor is a word that is born in the mouths of critics and has little relation to how poems are written and the needs of those to whom they are addressed. Poems are written and valued, not according to some mythical status in a competitive league that the authors inhabit, but according to the necessities of a particular place and a particular time. Some—many—survive beyond their time, carrying their impact into fresh and unsuspecting minds. Certainly to read Coventry Patmore now is to meet a mind of intriguing substance and still fresh insight, with a style and a range of interests that, in their time, anticipated Yeats and Hardy. Consider the Yeatsian tone in 'Departure'

> It was not like your great and gracious ways !
> Do you, that have nought other to lament,
> Never, my Love, repent
> Of how, that July afternoon,
> You went,
> With sudden, unintelligible phrase,
> And frighten'd eye,
> Upon your journey of so many days,
> Without a single kiss, or a good-bye ?

Or the sound of Hardy in 'The Rosy Bosom'd Hours'

> I loved that girl, so gaunt and tall,
> Who whispered loud, 'Sweet Thing !'
> Scanning your figure, slight yet all
> Round as your own gold ring.

At Salisbury you stray'd alone
Within the shafted glooms,
Whilst I was by the Verger shown
The brasses and the tombs.

Patmore more than any other Victorian made poetry out of the domestic scene, especially of marriage. In 'The Angel in the House' Vaughan is asked what will be the theme of his poem.

Then she: 'What is it, Dear? The Life
'Of Arthur, or Jerusalem's Fall?'
'Neither: your gentle self, my Wife,
'And love, that grows from one to all.

And all this is to anticipate one of the leading preoccupations of the modern poetic scene, in America as well as England. But if he is domestic, Patmore is never merely domesticated, which is what makes his verse so much more alive than much modern writing. It is a point Dr. Dhar brings out strongly, the link for Patmore, the 'uxorious mystic' between human love and diving love, both as its image and as key. As Patmore sees

the depths of life
In loves of Husband and of Wife,
Child, Mother, Father, simple keys
To what cold faith calls mysteries.

He has indeed been accused of 'mixing up amorousness with religion' but Dr. Dhar clearly shows that this is to see too narrowly the man, the Christian tradition, in which the sexual comparison is ancient and pervasive, and also the centrality in that tradition of the Incarnation which, more than anything else, validates the use of physical reality to lead our understanding towards a divine reality.

But Dr. Dhar is not concerned with this usage only as a technique of understanding or of communication—something set within the realm of *knowledge*. Rather he is preoccupied with the role of poetry in our *experience* of the divine. The question is then how does poetry relate to the mystical. Dr. Dhar makes an elegant distinction. Poetry he says 'does not

present us with mystical experience but is constantly rebodying it', and later quotes Patmore, reinforcing the heart of this distinction. 'There is a poetic region—the most poetical of all—which is incapable of taking the form of poetry'. The point at which language becomes inadequate to expression, with St. Paul's *archana verba*, *que non licet homini loqui* ('secret words which it is not allowed man to utter', 2. *Cor.* 12 : (4) is constantly in view. Mystics address themselves, as writers, to an area by definition beyond the senses and beyond time and so not capable of expression in language which is bound in time and in the senses. What we are close to here are the limits of language—which is why Dr. Dhar's subject is so important. Ultimately it is addressing the test case for the possibilities of verbal expression. And at the same time it can be argued that poetry itself with its strong thrust towards concrete expression of the invisible or metaphysical, is vital for understanding the balance struck in most religions between the physical and spiritual worlds. In mystical terms, it is the poet who is most persuaded of the uses of the positive way in approaching God, the way in which variety expresses unity rather than is eliminated from its expression.

Many studies which aim to link poetry and mysticism become generalised as they attempt to draw universal conclusions and ponder the luminous abstractions which the mystically inclined will offer us instead of thought. Dr. Dhar nicely avoids this by concentrating his attention precisely on particular poets. His second subject, Francis Thompson, is not so considerable a poet as Patmore. At the same time he is by no means only to be remembered as the author of 'The Hound of Heaven'. He is more conscious than Patmore of that sense of the illusion of the world's presences which in Western thought comes down to us from Plato.

> Life's a veil that real has :
> All the shadows of our scene
> Are but shows of things that pass
> On the other side the screen.

he writes in 'An Echo of Victor Hugo'. As I sit here writing on the last day of the Lord's Test it occurs to me that the

poignant strength of that greatest of cricket poems, Francis Thompson's 'At Lord's', is not merely in the poignancy of nostalgia, but in the sense of the lovely ephemera with which we fill our lives.

> For the field is full of shades as I near the shadowy coast,
> And a ghostly batsman plays to the bowling of a ghost,
> And I look through my tears on a soundless-clapping host
> As the run-stealers flicker to and fro,
> To and fro :—
> O my Hornby and my Barlow long ago!

What, of course, this standpoint on the physical reality around us does is to make of that reality a fiction, that is to say, a work of art. Consider the moment when Melville's heroine Hunilla witnesses helplessly the drowning of her husband and of her brother in 'Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow'

> And there, the invisible painter painted to her view the wave-tossed and disjointed raft, its once level logs slantingly upheaved, as raking masts, and the four struggling arms undistinguishable among them ; and then all subsided into smooth-flowing creamy waters, slowly drifting the splintered wreck ; while first and last, no sound of any sort was heard. Death in a silent picture ; a dream of the eye ; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows.

Hunilla's escape is into grief shaped, if not assuaged, by her religion.

> her hands extended
> to the cross-foot, with a little brass crucifix clasped between ; a crucifix worn featureless, like an ancient graven knocker long plied in vain.

And Thompson's escape from suffering and a brooding inanition is also into religion, for him a Baroque form of Catholicism bred out of Crashaw and of English metaphysical piety. It is a particularly warm and attractive *cultus*

> Teach us but, to grace our prayers,
> Such divinity of tears,—

Earth should be lustrate again
With contrition of that rain :
Till celestial floods o'er-rise
The high tops of Paradise.

Thompson was also a fine writer of prose and in one essay *Health and Holiness : A study of the Relations between Brother Ass, the Body & His Rider, the Soul,* he draws his understanding of poetry close into his exprience of religion, proposing an elaborate parallel between the processes of spirituality and of artistic endeavour. 'Grace does not cast out nature ; but the way of grace is founded on nature. Sanctity is genius in religion ;' he says, and goes on, 'Spiritual incubation obeys the same unheard command ; whether it be Coleridge in his cottage at Nether Stowey, or Ignatius in his cave at Manresa.'

It is in this area of parallel structure or of substantial identity between the two modes that Dr. Dhar's study operates. His poets are well chosen to carry his case. Neither is idiosyncratic and *sui generis.* They are set within a visible and constant Christian tradition, most potently displayed in *English* literature in the seventeenth century. Thompson is not so powerful or original a poet as Patmore. His writing is more heartfelt pastiche than vigorous development. Effects such as the spare metaphysicality of Patmore's

In the dark hour
When phrases are in power,
And nought to choose between
The thing which is not and which is not seen,

or

And look of exile from some great repose, the sphere
Of ether, moved by ether only, or
By something still more tranquil.

are beyond him. But to read either poet is to realise freshly that Yeat's eclectic philosophical speculations are not just the extrapolation of Blake and the Neo-Platonists but a variation set within wider rings of spirituality availabe to the nineteenth century.

It is one of the attractions of the present book that Dr. Dhar, writing from within the traditions of India, adds a further ring. Learned in his understanding of Christianity, especially in his sense of the central importance of the Incarnation, he adds the insights of another spirituality, not dissonant but distinct, and so additionally illuminating. It is a book much to be enjoyed and savoured.

University of Exeter
July 1985

Ronald Tamplin

PREFACE

In the nineteenth century, 'mysticism' was generally used in its derogatory sense in the west, confused with mere emotionalism and with what is misty and vague. Today, however, when psychology has made significant advances, it is no longer considered bizarre : and so a balanced view of its claims has become possible now. We are able to define the nature and scope of the mystical experience in relation to the aesthetic process. This makes valid the study of mysticism articulated in literature. It is in this context that Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson should be of interest to readers today.

Patmore and Thompson have been unduly neglected ; they deserve more critical attention. The present study seeks to explore and examine the mystical element in their poetry with a view to defining its characteristic features in either poet. It focusses attention on their mystical motifs and the way in which they are expressed. The discussion of the stylistic aspect of their poetry attempted specifically in the last chapter throws further light on the quality of their mystic vision.

In determining what is mystical in Patmore and Thompson, emphasis in this study has been laid on the textual evidence. Correspondingly, there is a minimum of reliance on ancillary material in the form of biographical data. Whereas the available criticism on the poets leans heavily on the biographical and the psychological, the present study has a markedly textual base, its underlying assumption being that mysticism in literature reveals universal characteristics, beyond the terms and accents it may owe to a particular creed. It is broadly from this angle that this work aims to establish how far Patmore and Thompson are mystical poets and what links them as such, taking into account their place in the mystical tradition of English poetry.

The study is based on the doctoral research I carried out at the C.I.E. & F.L., Hyderabad, under the supervision of Professor K. Subramanian. I am grateful to Professor S. Manzoor Alam, Vice-Chancellor, University of Kashmir, for encouraging me to publish the work and to the University of Kashmir for a supporting grant. I am indebted further to Professor Laurence Lerner of the University of Sussex and to Professor G.K. Das of the University of Delhi for their valuable criticism. My thanks also go to my colleagues, Dr. T.N. Dhar and Mr. Mohamad Amin, for useful comments and suggestions.

I should specially thank Mr. Ronald Tamplin of the University of Exeter, himself a poet and a scholar of mysticism, for writing the foreword to this work.

July 1985.

A.N. Dhar

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The Mystical Tradition and British Poetry

Mysticism and Poetry

Belief in the unseen is a universal characteristic of religion. All religious belief essentially involves commitment and obligation, and may appear mere ritual to the unenlightened. Mysticism, seen rightly, is not something opposed or alien to religion. It stands at the very root of religious experience. The mystic, not content with the bare externals of religion, seeks a direct experience of God or the Ultimate Reality. He aims to bring himself into an intimate relationship with the Divine. This attitude—the insistence on direct experience—establishes his kinship with the founders of various faiths "who owed their power and originality to the fact of their personal communion with the divine."[1] Hence there is no conflict between the mystical temper and the practice of religious belief. In fact, mysticism and religion are integrally linked, though there have been many mystics who steered clear of creeds and dogmas. The intricate nature of the relation between the two has been appropriately pointed out:

> Though no deeply religious person can be without a touch of mysticism, and no mystic can be, in the deepest sense, other than religious, the dialogue between mystics and conventional religionists has been far from happy. . . .

> Though it validates religion, mysticism also tends to escape the fetters of organized religion.[2]

The "religious" and the "mystic" shade into each other in what is taken to be religious mysticism, practised by those in whom mystical temper and religious devotion reinforce each other. Otto Pfleiderer, a 19th century scholar, says aptly that mysticism is "the immediate feeling of unity of the self with God; it is nothing, therefore, but the fundamental feeling of religion, the religious life at its heart and centre."[3]

The mysticism that we come across in English poetry is largely Christian in inspiration. However, it bears definite marks of neo-Platonic thought. Christianity, with its highly catholic character, readily absorbed the mystical concepts based on neo-Platonism. This synthesis took place during the Renaissance when Christian thinkers, with an open mind, studied Greek literature and philosophy and freely assimilated Pagan wisdom into their theology. Although the Greeks had already given a humanistic bias to eastern mysticism by emphasizing the beauty of the human form, it was in the doctrine of Incarnation, the cardinal fact of Christianity, that humanism and mysticism found their proper synthesis. Besides, it is in the Incarnation that the contradictory modes of mystical thought, connected respectively with transcendence and immanence, are reconciled meaningfully.

A pertinent question that should arise in any discussion of the "religious" and the "mystic" in relation to poetry is : can what is mystical or deeply religious be communicated poetically, and, how far should the poetic medium be relied upon to achieve this communication? Religious devotion and mystical contemplation, as we have maintained, are not incompatible but often go together. To the extent experiences of this sort can be articulated, one can think of no better medium of communication than poetry itself. At this point, it is useful to ponder the views of Dr. Johnson, T.S. Eliot and T.E. Hulme, challenging the very status and value of devotional poetry. Dr. Johnson's attack on poetical devotion is based on the incompatibility he sees between "religious activity, and poetry."[4] He is not critical of the devotional frame of mind

as such but is of the view that the state of mind in the attitude of prayer is a higher one than poetry can confer. Though T.S. Eliot does not consider poetry and devotion incompatible, he is not prepared to accord the status of major poets to those who sing of the Divine. In his view, devotional poetry has a limited range inasmuch as it leaves out "major passions". Such poetry, he adds, gives a limited kind of pleasure. T.E. Hulme points out that man engaged in the pursuit of the Divine, more specifically when he is absorbed in prayer, is not his normal, natural self. In terms of his argument, devotional poems do not project an image of the natural man. As Helen Gardner rightly points out, we notice variations "from age to age in the concept of religion and the concept of poetry and the interactions between them."[5] The views of the three critics mentioned above are thus coloured by what each of them understood by the terms 'religion' and 'poetry'. When Johnson talks of poetry, he is preoccupied with the requirements of the poetic art as an exercise in conscious craftsmanship. Eliot considers the value of poetry in terms of the general "awareness" expected of the poet while Hulme is concerned about the image of the "natural man". No final judgement can be given about the status of religious or mystical verse. At any rate, such verse has its place in the scheme of poetry so long as it is not divorced from a human interest. Stressing sharp distinction between humanistic and religious verse, as Hulme does, is not quite valid, for we find that human and religious interests intermingle in sacred verse as they do in life. The ultimate value of poetry, of whatever kind it be, depends on its abiding value to man, though shifts in taste may temporarily obscure its worth.

It is now appropriate to consider the special problem 'the unutterable' poses for a poet in terms of the medium. In other words, we have to see how far poetic language is a fit medium for conveying experiences and intuitions of the mystical kind. Mystics of all times have generally emphasized the imageless character of Reality. Among the Christian mystics of the Middle Ages, Dionysius the Areopagite (who wrote between 475 and 525 AD) deserves special mention in this regard. As a mystical thinker, he faithfully followed Plotinus and

introduced the seemingly contradictory concept of "divine dark" into Christian mystical theology. The concept was a little perplexing to the Christians since it put unusual emphasis on the attributeless character of Reality. Ordinarily, those who conceive of Reality in transcendental terms find an inherent inadequacy in language as a medium of communication. At the same time, it is interesting to see how poetic language performs the paradoxical function of suggesting experiences from which ordinary speech turns back in dismay. Ernst Cassirer speaks of the inherent power of language itself that is exploited by the articulate mystic :

> Thus all mysticism is directed toward a world beyond language, a world of silence. . . . The spiritual depth and power of language is strikingly evinced in the fact that it is speech itself which prepares the way for that last step whereby it is itself transcended.[6]

The language of "silence" met with in mystical poetry consists generally of negative terms, subtle suggestions and paradoxes. Eliot's famous lines from the *Four Quartets* provide a good illustration :

> You must go through the way in which you are not,
> And what you do not know is the only thing you know
> And what you own is what you do not own
> And where you are is where you are not.

It remains a paradox that the mystic-poet finds suitable words and symbols to present an approximate image of the very reality he affirms "hath no image". Mystics have, in fact, given the poet "a large number of poetic similes and metaphors, such as the Desert of Godhead, the Marriage of the Soul, the Kiss of Christ, the Cloud of Unknowing, the Divine Dark and the Beatific Vision, to name only a few."[7]

An experience closely related to the mystical that we discussed above is what may be termed as visionary experience; it is at the other extreme of "dark contemplation" that can only be described in negative terms. Often mystics of the

visionary type experience an illuminated vision of the world. In their heightened state, they see the natural world around them transfigured, "clothed in celestial light". Or else, they may have brilliant visions of their own, of the kind described by Aldous Huxley in *The Doors of Perception*,[8] although whether drugs, as claimed by him, actually open "the doors of perception" is difficult to establish. What is, however, significant is that the visionary imagination of the mystical type does not differ qualitatively from the poetic imagination (making use of sensorial images), when both are viewed as involving an expansion of consciousness. This leads us to the conclusion that poetry and mysticism are closely related, and it is wrong to see a dichotomy between the two. Helen C. White makes an important observation in this behalf :

> It is not a strange hybrid of poet and mystic who writes a mystical poem. It is not a man who writes first as a mystic and then as a poet. It is not even a mystic who turns over to the poet who happens to dwell within the same brain and body the materials of his insight to be made into a work of art by the competent craftsman. It is rather that the same human being is at once poet and mystic, at one and the same time, from the beginning of the process to the end.[9]

The symbols and images that we come across in mystical verse are of varied kinds. In Christian mystical verse, they are often traditional, based on the language of the scriptures and other sacred writings. An important feature of mystical literature in general is that it celebrates divine love in terms of images drawn from earthly love. Thus the concept of "spiritual marriage" is central to Christian mystical theology. According to this concept, the fulfilment of spirituality is analogically realized in the wedlock of the soul with Christ as 'her bridegroom.' The nuptial analogy is a persistent *motif* in English mystical verse, making use of the erotic images one often finds in secular verse. Besides the symbolism of marriage, we find other types of symbolism too in mystical verse—notably the symbolism of 'journey' (with a 'place' or 'state' as the goal)

and that of 'deification.' All these types are represented in English mystical verse.

In our discussion above, we saw how the "religious" and the "mystic" are related. We maintained further that poetry and mysticism are interrelated. To see these connections in a clearer light, it should be useful to refer to the notion of "the sacred" as elaborated by Mircea Eliade and treated at length by Vincent Buckley in relation to English poetry. Agreeing with Eliade's view that the element of "the sacred" is "an irreducible element in all religious experience," Buckley maintains that it is more appropriate to speak in terms of the religious nature of poetry than confine the term "sacred" to purely religious poetry. At the same time, he is flexible in his view in affirming the specific character of religious verse and the persistence of Christian piety as a tradition in English poetry. He does not, however, fail to see how the element of "the sacred" has continued to occur, in a variety of forms and in diverse ways, in English poetry right upto modern times, not being *recognizably* religious. In support of his position he quotes Donald Davie : "The very act of poetry implies a religious view of the world." Very perceptively, Buckley traces the growth of religious verse along two lines—not always and necessarily distinctly apart--from medieval to modern times. Of the two types, the one which is actually Christian or devotional in inspiration is represented by theistic poets, who have shrunk to a minority in our times. The other type refers to poets who are religious without a theistic commitment or whose poetry reflects unwittingly a religious interest despite their secular or humanistic preoccupations.[10] This distinction is also reflected in what could specifically be characterized as English mystical verse.

Mysticism in English Poetry

Mystical thought occurs throughout in various degrees and forms in English literature. From the fourteenth century onwards, the mystical tradition grew steadily in England. Contemplation was then socially recognized as the noblest activity one could engage in. Richard Rolle of Hampole (1300-1349 AD) was the earliest of the English mystics to

communicate his experiences in his own tongue. He wrote a large number of treatises and poems in Latin and English. The distinguishing mark of his mystical experience is that it is expressed by him in terms of imagery drawn from music. Another fourteenth century English mystic who made a valuable contribution to mystical literature is the unknown author of 'The Cloud of Unknowing.' The concept represented by the "cloud" symbol derives actually from the "fundamental treatise on the *via negativa, The Mystical Theology* of the pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite."[11]

It was, however, in the seventeenth century that mystical verse flourished in England. Comparatively speaking, it was a period of settled belief. A number of poets belonging to the "school of Donne," known popularly as the Divine poets of the seventeenth century, distinguished themselves by writing verse that gave superb expression to their religious experience. They were devout Christians and, although not altogether free from doubts and perplexities, their religious moorings were firm; they never crossed the bounds of dogma. That explains why the general tone of their verse is optimistic as far as belief is concerned. Their poems reveal a sensibility akin to the mystical. Intensely and intimately involved with the object of their devotion, they sing invariably in the language of the mystics. Although their terminology is largely Christian, their poems should appeal to people of all faiths.

The Divine poets mentioned above, notably George Herbert, Richard Crawshaw and Henry Vaughan, wrote poetry in the 'metaphysical' manner of Donne, but this did not stand in the way of their developing individual styles of their own. Their devotional poems are not just effusions but products of craftsmanship, giving the lie to Dr. Johnson's contention that poetry (as 'making') and devotion are incompatible. Donne's important contribution lay in the forging of a new poetic language that served as a model for the poets of his "school." In his hands, poetry acquired a distinctively intellectual tone and this is reflected in the religious lyrics of the Divine poets we have mentioned. Donne himself wrote poems addressed to the Divine, which are a record of his religious experience. However, he is essentially a wit and one would hesitate in

characterizing his divine poems as mystical. "The immediate sense of God was not for him. Vaughan, Blake and Francis Thompson were seers or mystics in a sense in which Donne never was. But he shared their desire."[12]

It was George Herbert who really transmuted the poetry of "metaphysical wit" into the poetry of religious experience. He produced a "common language" from the "intitial impulse of Donne's,"[13] and achieved mastery in writing the religious lyric. He draws on ordinary and familiar experiences which he presents in a language that is neat, urbane and pointed. In his religious lyrics, he speaks in the tone of one who is on terms of intimacy and familiarity with the Divine. The poem 'Love' could serve as an illustrative example :

> Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
> Guiltie of dust and sinne
> But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
> From my first entrance in,
> Drew near to me, sweetly questioning,
> If I lack'd anything.
> ....
> You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
> So I did sit and eat.

The poem illustrates how best Herbert assimilated Donne's manner and modified it to satisfy his own poetical need—the exposition of a sacred theme in human terms. The theme (a narrative) is built up here with an argument, a simple and plain discussion between two persons. "The relation between the soul and God is symbolized by a commonplace human situation, a travel-worn and shame-faced guest receiving hospitality."[14]

Richard Crawshaw acknowledged Herbert as his master. Endowed with a sensuous temperament, he wrote "in a vein of voluptuous mysticism." He deviates from the typical 'metaphysical' style in his fondness for sensorial images which he uses for ornamentation. His persistent use of the images of marriage, in both secular and devotional verse, and his fondness for paradox are his other distinguishing marks. He builds his themes round traditional Christian symbolism which it is

not difficult to decipher. His poems gain in mystical quality from the manner in which he sometimes exploits the sensuous images, the sensuous melting so remarkably "into the sphere of spirit." 'Prayer, An Ode' is considered to be the most mystical of his poems. The following lines speak of "spiritual marriage" and the related theme of "mystical death" :

> Delicious Deaths; soft exhalations
> Of souls; dear and divine annihilations;
> A thousand unknown rites
> Of joys and rarefy'd delights.

Henry Vaughan reveals a marked kinship with George Herbert. He is, however, specially sensitive to natural beauty and looks for mystical significance in the wonder that "hangs over common natural things, the flowers and trees." His religious intuitions seem to belong to the neo-Platonic tradition, and he is also influenced by Hermetic philosophy. The Hermetic tradition in Christian mysticism stressed the symbolism of "deification," a kind of 'alchemical' transformation of the human personality into the state of divinity. Vaughan is the poet of "illumination." His famous poem, 'The Retreat,' reveals his mystical belief in past existence. There are striking parallels between 'The Retreat' and Wordsworth's 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality.' Two other poems of his, 'The World' and 'They are all gone into the world of light' are also markedly mystical in conception.

Known as a mystical philosopher, Thomas Traherne resembles both Vaughan and Wordsworth in his feeling for Nature. He is pantheistic in outlook, foreshadowing Wordsworth in the account the latter gives of his childhood experiences. There are clear affinities between Traherne's illuminated vision of the world and Wordworth's as given in the Immortality Ode. Traherne records his childhood vision of the world as one of sheer wonder and delight :

> How like an Angel came I down!
> How Bright are all things here!
> When first among his Works I did appear
> O how their GLORY we did Crown?
> The World resembled his *Eternitie,*

In which my Soul did Walk;
And every thing that I did see,
Did with me talk.
The skies in their Magnificence,
The Lively, Lovely Air;
Oh how Divine, how Soft, how Sweet, how fair!
The Stars did entertain my Sence,
And all the Works of God so Bright and pure,
So Rich and Great did seem,
As if they ever must endure,
In my Esteem.
A Native Health and Innocence
Within my Bones did grow,
And while my God did all his Glories shew,
I felt a vigour in my Sence
That was all SPIRIT, I within did flow
With Seas of Life, like Wine,
I nothing in the World did know,
But't was Divine.

('Wonder')

Having briefly discussed the Divine poets of the seventeenth century, we turn our attention to two important poets—Blake and Wordsworth (whom Vincent Buckley places among the "non-professing poets"). Blake, at once mystic and poet, was throughout conscious of his role as a 'prophet.' He "conceived that it was his vocation to bring. . . mystical illumination within the range of ordinary man"[15] and believed that the Infinite is within man's reach if his "doors of perception are cleansed." His poems afford sufficient evidence of his unique perception, of his ability to look at life from an unusual mystical angle; his poetic vision conveys a surprise of "revelation."

Quite often mystics talk in riddles and parables. Even though they may convey their message in simple idiom, the meaning is not always easy to grasp. This is characteristically true of Blake. It is not surprising that he was not understood by the unimaginative lady who declared him mad for having said that he had *touched* the sky with his finger. His

unorthodox views, and the unusual idiom in which he conveyed them, reflect a perception of things that is not spoiled by 'custom.' His stress on the cultivation of the 'Imagination' proceeds from his concern for man's spiritual regeneration. He is an articulate mystic of the "psychological type known as 'visionary'."[16] Revealed truths come to him in the form of vivid images. He has an intimate experience of cosmic consciousness inasmuch as he can see "a World in a grain of sand." He never doubted his prophetic powers and believed that he held free converse with angels. All such beliefs were grounded in the quality of his visions, which differed from those of his fellow-mystics in being "corporeal" and not just "imaginary." Gifted with "sacramental perception," he sees the Infinite in all beings. He looks upon the senses "as the gateway to eternity" and values human love for its essentially divine character.

Blake is at his best in the *Songs*, which adequately express his vision. He desired that the two sets of songs, under the titles 'Innocence' and Experience,' should be contrasted as they "show the two contrary states of the human soul." The insistence on this contrast should not blind us to the fact that the two sets together constitute an artistic whole. The full meaning of the poems hinges on the principle of contrast as revealing an integral vision of life in which 'good' and 'evil' are balanced. Experience and Innocence seemingly run counter to each other but viewed together point towards a higher synthesis embodying the mystical and enigmatic truth at the root of life. Mysticism essentially views both 'good' and 'evil' as illusory, and Blake's purpose is to drive this truth home to us poetically. Not interested in describing Nature, he presents in the *songs* images symbolizing a higher invisible world. His technique consists in juxtaposing the image and the mystical concept whereby he conveys his perception of the spiritual realm. Let us now look at 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger' with a view to seeing how they represent "the two contrary states of the human soul." The two poems are companion pieces and, therefore, are to be read together. The speaker in 'The Lamb' is a child who knows the Deity as a protective master. In 'The Tyger' the speaker is an adult. The tiger's "fearful symmetry" suggests to him the terrible aspect of a mysterious power

operating in the universe. The images of the lamb and the tiger, juxtaposed together, evoke a sharp sense of contrast between the 'benevolent' and 'malevolent' aspects of the Deity, who thus remains an abscure and mysterious figure. The speaker in 'The Tyger' poses questions that are perplexing and unanswerable. However, read as companion poems, 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger' hint at what is not explicable, conveying a feeling bordering on an awareness of the Infinite.

In the Romantic era, the position of belief was no more secure; religion came into a sharp conflict with science. A new trend is thus discernible in religious verse, of which Wordsworth could be looked upon as the leading representative. The new note continues to be religious in spirit but there is no firm theistic commitment; secular and humanistic interests also creep in. In Wordsworth, we notice a shift towards theism only in his later phase; his earlier poems reveal him as a "pantheist" rather than a committed Christian, a "Nature-mystic" with a marked humanitarian bias. His feeling for Nature is invariably mystical in character. W.R. Inge describes him as "the greatest prophet of contemplative mysticism."[17] The larger body of his verse is contemplative in mood and in a number of his poems, especially 'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey', 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' and 'The Prelude', the meditative and mystical element is insistent. Throughout, the poet values and stresses contemplation; he often dwells on the significance of the condition of equilibrium, the "wise passiveness" that he considers essential to spiritual growth.

Of Wordsworth's poems mentioned above, 'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey' is the finest example of his contemplation of Nature. An awareness of the divine spirit inhabiting Nature is conveyed here through a language "deceptively simple." In a general and non-specific sense, we could characterize this poem as one of meditation. The progress of its theme and its "composition" suggest parallels with the poetry of classical meditation discussed by Louis Martz.[18] The tradition of this kind of poetry goes back to the Christian saint-mystic, Ignatius Loyola, who set the pattern for religious meditation in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Consistent with this

tradition, a poem for a devout Christian became an exercise in divine contemplation, involving the "composition" of a religious scene. This in its turn stimulated a recollection of sacred associations leading to a spiritual understanding, culminating in the devotee's resolve to sustain his spiritual effort: a sequence of the exercises of "memory, understanding and will." This tradition of poetry set the pattern for combining religious meditation and poetic composition—a valid evidence against the thesis that prayer and poetic activity are incompatible. A pattern similar to that of the poetry of classical meditation is noticeable in Wordsworth's poem, although it is not specifically 'religious'. Instead of a religious Deity, the object of worship is Nature. Wordsworth associates sacred feelings with the Wye Valley, the place that is "composed" in the poem. His recollections promote his understanding and strengthen his faith in Nature, and in the traditional manner of a devotee, he resolves to persevere in his meditations.[19]

To see what is mystical in the poem, let us look at the famous passage that has been widely discussed and quoted and variously interpreted :

> To them I may have owed another gift. Nor less, I trust
> Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened; that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motions of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul;
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

The very language of the passage carries the authenticity of a vivid and live experience. The words "body" and "soul" are crucial to our understanding of the experience that is recorded

in the lines. Mystics speak of things incommunicable, beyond the domain of the senses and the normal powers of human perception. Wordsworth's mystical intuition is not of that order. He is essentially a "sensationalist" and his "mysticism is grounded and rooted actually *in* the senses."[20] Blake insisted on cleansing "the doors of perception" before we can realize the senses as "the gateway to eternity." Wordsworth's experience here proves the validity of Blake's assertion. His contemplation of the "beauteous forms" and the resultant *sensations* experienced by him seem to have "blessed" him with a new perception: a heightened awareness of things, or an intense consciousness, in contradistinction to the temporary suspension of the bodily functions. Becoming "a living soul" points clearly to a state of awareness that accompanies deep contemplation. In this state, the poet sees "into the life of things"—a positive gain in terms of expanded consciousness.

In the subsequent lines of the poem, Wordsworth betrays a lack of confidence in the authenticity of his experience. This is understandable. His momentary flashes of insight were not powerful enough to dispel his doubts completely. That explains the wariness with which he states his unsure belief. What he meant by seeing "into the life of things" is, however, made explicit in these lines :

> . . .And I have felt
> A presence, that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky and the mind of the man;
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

The language here is typically mystical. The use of the words "something" (a key-word in the passage), "sublime", "presence", "motion", "spirit", indicates that the poet is cautiously avoiding theological terms and trying to hint at

what he has perceived in his heightened mood. He seems to have had an experience of the mystical type as suggested by the word "felt", and he is not prepared to state it as a doctrine. He describes it best as a "sense sublime" of the ultimate unity of mind and Nature, the individual and the universe. On the whole, the poem reveals Wordsworth's reverence for Nature, his concern for suffering humanity and his mystical belief that "all which we behold is full of blessings."

Both Blake and Wordsworth represent mysticism that is universal in significance, having little to do with the Christian dogma. As we move into the Victorian period, we once again come across mysticism of the type represented by the Divine poets of the seventeenth century. In the chapter that follows, we will discuss this at some length in relation to Patmore and Francis Thompson.

NOTES

1 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 1929), p. 31.
2 S.K. Ghose, "Mysticism," in *The New Encyclopaedia Britanica* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britanica Inc., 1977), p. 786.
3 *Ibid., p.* 787.
4 Quoted in Helen Gardner, *Religion and Literature* (London : Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 123.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
6 *Language and Myth*, trans. Susan K. Langer (London: Constable and Co., 1946), p. 58.
7 Itrat Hussain, *The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1948), p. 34.
8 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971).
9 *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience* (1936; rpt. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 22.
10 Vincent Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968).
11 Phyllis Hodgson, *The Fourteenth Century English Mystics* (London: Longman's Green & Co., 1967), p. 12.
12 Joan Bennett, *Five Metaphysical Poets* (1964; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 136.
13 A. Alvarez, *The School of Donne* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), p. 69.
14 Joan Bennett, *Five Metaphysical Poets*, p. 68.

15 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1961), p. 235.
16 Margaret Rudd, *Divided Image* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), p. xiv.
17 W.R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), p. 305.
18 *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).
19 See Albert O. Wlecke, *Wordsworth and the Sublime* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 20-21.
20 A.W. Garrod, *Wordsworth* (1923; rpt. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 105.

2

Poetic Affinity

In the preceding chapter we reviewed briefly the mystical tradition in English Poetry. In this chapter, meant as an introduction to Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson, an attempt is made to place the two poets in the perspective of their age and bring out the nature and extent of their poetic affinity. For this purpose, the literary achievement of the two poets is discussed broadly (followed by closer textual study in the later chapters) and attention focussed on the Victorian background with special reference to the trends linked with the growth of religious poetry.

Much of the literature of the Victorian era is involved with the characteristic problems of the period. These problems exercised the minds of the major writers, for they had a high sense of social responsibility. This is specially true of the 'prophets' and reformers such as Carlyle, Dickens and Ruskin. They protested against what they saw as the evils of the age and pleaded for the preservation of human values, which they felt were being undermined by the new forces of "progress." Likewise, the major poets of the period, notably Tennyson, Browning and Arnold, wrote as masters responsible to their age, each committed in his own way to an individual view of life. Of the three poets, Tennyson, the acknowledged "bard" of his generation, sought a personal solution to the problem posed by the Christian faith, assailed as it was by doubts caused by the theory of evolution. His *In Memoriam*, though not a religious poem in the conventional sense, involves medita-

tions on the theme of immortality. These meditations certainly have a significance close to the religious. A disposition for philosophizing and moralizing in verse is equally evident in Robert Browning though he adopts many disguises and gives the impression of being detached in his monologues. His studies of Renaissance artists and clerics enabled him, indirectly, to express his views of human character—views which were not alien to his contemporaries. Matthew Arnold, in spite of a religious disposition, accepted the loss of faith, a general phenomenon in his time, as inevitable. Poetry, he asserted, could be an anodyne to the experience of a general cultural collapse. In 'The Scholar Gipsy,' 'Thyrsis' and 'Dover Beach', he voices the feelings of a saddened intellectual sensitive to the decline of religious values.

A large body of Victorian poetry is discursive in quality, often impregnated with speculative elements. In handling their mediums and materials, the poets are handicapped by an "indecision of thought" and "uncertainty of language"[1] traceable to the complexity and confusion typical of the period. When we judge the Victorian poet in the light of the ideas of poetry we owe to Eliot, Pound and Hulme, we cannot fail to perceive his limitation in forging a medium of his own to embody experiences powerfully felt, although the beginnings of a slow transition from traditional forms of verse to modern poetry can be traced to the Victorian period itself. Though poets like Tennyson and Arnold may write well, it is "almost impossible for them to write supremely well."[2] This kind of a valuation is not, however, equally applicable to religious verse, written within the framework of a traditional symbolism that must impose restrictions on the poet's use of language.

Although the general trend of the Victorian era was anti-Romantic, Romanticism survived in a specific form. The Middle Ages, which had cast a spell on the Romantics like Coleridge and Keats and been a source of literary inspiration to them, found favour with a class of intellectuals including men of religious convictions and literary tastes. An important manifestation of this revival of interest in the Middle Ages was the Oxford Movement. Connected with the Anglican Church, it sought to preserve and enhance ecclesiastical prestige

and authority. Its advocates pleaded for "a recovery of the tradition of piety, spirituality, and authority, as found in the English divines of the seventeenth century (Hooker, Andrewes, Vaughan, Ken) and in the great Church Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries."[3] Their protests against the growing liberalism of the time reflected an intense concern for religion as the only friend and saviour of man. The revival of interest in the Christian experience had implications for literature too. The Pre-Raphaelite poets, who were linked together by a community of interests, were closely associated with the Oxford Movement. They pursued a cult of Beauty in utter disregard of the philosophical or moral issues with which the great poets and writers of the time were vitally concerned. Not satisfied with the kind of poetry that was popular, they went back to the Middle Ages in search of an aesthetic that reconciled the claims of the body and the spirit. Rossetti took "delight in concrete definition," a quality that won him Pater's admiration.[4] This is reflected in his exploitation of sensory detail and his use of Christian symbolism. In the poets of the pre-Raphaelite school generally, the religious side of medievalism is seen only as an ancillary element assimilated to an aesthetic object. These poets were branded "fleshly," the Victorians being shocked by their glorification of the senses.

Although the crisis of religious belief generated acute spiritual unrest among the Victorian intellectuals, the majority of the middle class continued in its allegiance to Evangelicalism. Genuine devotion was not lacking but a "spontaneous and imaginative religious experience was harder than ever to come by."[5] The position of belief was insecure in the face of the developing scientism of the age, which questioned the claims and basic assumptions of all forms of religion. In such an atmosphere, devotional or religious verse could not thrive, the poet's task being made more difficult by the uncertain state of the English language itself. For the Divine poets of the seventeenth century, a theological term such as 'soul' had an accepted conceptual meaning. Unlike them, the Victorians generally understood by it something equivalent to feeling. As the terminology of religion was fast losing its traditional meaning during the period, an appropriate response to religious

verse, involving the use of such terms for a direct assertion of dogma or doctrine, could not be guaranteed. Difficulties of this sort have, however, been surmounted by poets, and the religious impulse has continued to find expression in poetry in varied and novel forms (as maintainted in the preceding chapter). Thus, amidst the complexities of the Victorian era, there was the growth of "a new religious poetry, Catholic and mystical in motive. . . owing a spiritual allegiance to the religious poetry of the seventeenth century"[6]—a phenomenon that seems to have been generally overlooked. A revival of interest in the religious side of medievalism, marked by an indifference to the intellectual controversies of the day, was the chief inspiration of this poetry, and the Divine poets of the seventeenth century reinforced this inspiration. The pre-Raphaelites, as stated earlier, evinced a parallel interest in the legends and rituals of the Middle Ages, but their aestheticism did not have a religious motivation nor were they drawn to the Divine poets of the seventeenth century. Coventry Patmore, G.M. Hopkins and Francis Thompson, linked by their Catholic faith, and Christina Rossetti, influenced more specifically by the Oxford Movement, could be singled out as the poets who made a significant contribution to the religious poetry of the Victorian age. In these poets we find little evidence of the unrest that is generally associated with the Victorian era.

Christina Rossetti shares some of the characteristics of her brother, D.G. Rossetti, as far as her poetic technique is concerned. However, she maintains an individual tone, marked by an intense spirituality: a religious acceptance gained through renunciation, often accompanied by a sense of pain and deprivation. The simplicity of her language and manner, and the lyrical intensity of her devotion are in sharp contrast to the general Victorian diffuseness, and hence perhaps her appeal to the modern reader. The poem 'Uphill' among her *Goblin Market* pieces, establishes her affinity with George Herbert as a powerful writer of religious lyrics.

Before dealing with the two poets with whom we are mainly concerned, it should be appropriate to make a brief mention here about the distinctive qualities of Hopkins as a religious poet. He became a celebrity after the major part of his work

was published in the present century. The circumstances of his belated discovery and also the special qualities of his verse, have given him a place among the modern poets. His distinction owes itself to the way he uses the resources of language, making it answer the pressure of his religious experience. This is what renders his poetry "un-Tennysonian." Otherwise, considering the materials he handles, he is very much a Victorian. His pre-Raphaelite affinities are also apparent. In the manner of that school, he concentrates on the distinctive quality of a thing—what he terms the "inscape." The term "inscape" (as also the other related term "instress") has a religious and also a technical connotation. By it Hopkins means the unique form of a work of art. This, in his view, is comparable to the individual soul seen as distinct from every other soul. As a religious poet, Hopkins reminds us of the Metaphysicals in achieving a fusion of passion and intelligence that gives his verse a distinctive quality. His sensuous response to Nature, a quality linking him specially with Duns Scotus, who inspired him, made Eliot describe him as a "Nature Poet" rather than a "religious poet." Eliot even associated him with Meredith, who is Pagan rather than Christian in thinking. Hopkins, however, is unmistakably a religious poet. To him the beauty of Nature spoke of God and we find this feeling powerfully expressed in such poems as 'God's Grandeur' and 'Pied Beauty.' In spite of the difficulties of symbolism for non-co-religionists, Hopkins' famous poem, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and many of the sonnets written subsequently, including the superb 'Windhover,' do claim attention for the profound religious experience they embody.

Hopkins' language and style have received adequate critical attention to the corresponding neglect of Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson, his co-religionists and contemporaries. He has undoubtedly overshadowed them and his literary reputation has been steadily growing. His technical skill, strictly speaking, is inseparable from his religious vision as indeed the very terminology he uses in relation to poetry (the "inscape" and "instress" we have mentioned) would show. His resourcefulness in handling language distinguishes him as a writer of religious verse. It particularly accounts for the

great originality that is so evident in his use of religious symbolism. In the poetry of Patmore and Thompson, the language of traditional symbolism is inevitably and conspicuously present. The two poets were friends linked together by the common sources of their religious and literary inspiration. Patmore was a friend of Hopkins too, their friendship based largely on their shared literary interests besides their religious affinity. Hopkins and Thompson did not know each other. Both were younger than Patmore (by 21 and 36 years respectively) and held him in great respect.

Thompson acknowledged Patmore as his master. As he came under his influence, he consciously tried to learn from his methods and practice. For his own part, Patmore claimed special interest in Thompson whom he admired for his promise and attainment. A mystical strain of thought runs through the work of both the poets. The early Patmore leans markedly towards the pre-Raphaelites, who owned and admired him unreservedly. With his poetic maturity, the poet outgrew pre-Raphaelitism and he changed his models. His conversion to Roman Catholicism led to his close intimacy with mystical reading, which stimulated his interest further in the poets of the seventeenth century. The meagre correspondence between Hopkins and Patmore has brought interesting facts to light regarding their poetic theories and practice and shown beyond doubt that they valued each other's views and suggestions. Thompson, being more specifically a poet of the nineties, is lumped by some critics with the Rhymers' Club comprising the poets known to have displayed characteristics which contrasted with the typical moral and intellectual pre-occupations of the age. Thompson's strong religious interests indicate unmistakably that he cannot be classed with them. Admired overenthusiastically in his own time and even believed to have outdone Patmore, his reputation has suffered a decline ever since. However, his poetry has evoked a special response in some countries of the continent, particularly France. Interestingly, Patmore's continental reputation is greater than his reputation in his own country. Neither Thompson nor Patmore was rooted in his period, although they did not entirely escape the influence of their contemporaries and

immediate predecessors as far as their materials and manner are concerned. Significantly, their poetry bears marks of the seventeenth century manner associated with the Metaphysicals, who were generally neglected by the Victorians.

As a poet, however, Patmore has been neglected or not properly estimated.[7] His wide scholarship and talent have, no doubt, attracted attention but even his admirers have not recognized his poetic excellence without reservations. He is "still potential[8] and deserves a place beside the major poets of his age, if not as an illustrious equal but as one "surely at the top of the second class."[9] A gifted and versatile intellectual, he maintained views that often ran counter to the trend of his times. He did not share the political and economic optimism of the day and as far as his poetic practice is concerned, he chose to handle difficult forms (the "irregular" odes) in his later poetry, refusing to pursue an easy path to success and popularity. He claimed that "he was the only poet of his generation, except Barnes, who steadily maintained a literary conscience."[10]

Patmore's earlier verse is not free from the didacticism and sentimentality characteristic of the Victorian verse. His initial exercises in poetry are imitative and derivative in character, revealing a "romantic idealism and melancholy" which link him with Tennyson and the older Romantics. His first poetic success, the long poem entitled *The Angel in the House*, published in 1854, brought him immediately into the limelight. Here Patmore makes his mark as a singer of wedded love, a theme dear to the Victorians, and more specially so to the poet himself. The poem concerns the love-making of Felix Vaughan, poet and farmer-gentleman, who, without struggle, wins and marries the beautiful Honoria, daughter of the Dean of Sarum. The simple narrative presents little complications. There are no exciting situations or surprising turns of events to grip the reader's attention. The simple plot is matched by the smooth movement of the verse, written in the form of iambic octosyllabic quatrains. Patmore found this verse-pattern easy to handle and appropriate to his purpose: the telling of a domestic tale of love. It is believed that his first wife, Emily, was the chief inspiration of *The Angel*, but (as

will be shown in Chapter IV) it is easy to see that the poet's lyrical interest in marriage springs largely from his mystical intuitions confirmed by his faith. However,the romance of marriage celebrated in the poem, viewed and recapitulated in the various phases and moods of pre-marital courtship leading to the happy union, looks somewhat tame in the conventional setting of the Victorian Deanery. Yet the poet succeeds in highlighting the abiding joy at the core of the nuptial relation, whose glamour and value are often lost to the mere sensulist. Images of light and splendour, suggesting a paradisal state, pervade the whole poem. A woman's love for her husband, conceived in Christian terms, is shown to parallel and anticipate that of the soul for God:

> This little germ of nuptial love,
> Which springs so simply from the sod,
> The root is, as my song shall prove,
> Of all our love to man and God.[11] (p. 96)

On the whole, the transcendental element is subsumed under the domestic story that satisfied Victorian tastes. It is only in his later poems, the odes included under *The Unknown Eros*, that Patmore develops the theme of wedded love into an elaborate symbolism embodying rare mystical concepts the Victorians could not appreciate and admire.

The Angel in the House approaches the Tennysonian kind of verse as a model. We have evidence here of Patmore's technical ability and also of his aptitude for epigrammatic writing, a thing rare in his period.[12] As far as Patmore's intellectual equipment is concerned, it is generally of a high order, strengthened by his extensive scholarship. Both in *The Angel* and its sequal, *The Victories of Love*, we come across occasional lines reminiscent of or revealing an affinity with the Metaphysicals. Dr. Mario Praz, followed by J.C. Reid, has drawn attention to many such lines, maintaining that the chief influence on Patmore is Donne. The conceit in these lines of 'The Koh-i-noor' has specially attracted critical attention in this regard:

'You have my heart so sweetly seized,
'And I confess, nay, 'tis my pride
'That I'm with you so solely pleased,
'That, if I'm pleased with aught beside,
'As music, or the month of June,
'My friend's devotion, or his wit,
'A rose, a rainbow, or the moon,
'It is that you illustrate it.
'All these are parts, you are the whole,
'You fit the taste for Paradise,
'To which your charms draw up the soul
'As turning spirals draw the eyes. (p. 184.)

There are many lines scattered through *The Angel* which either capture Donne's manner or echo his language in familiar turns of phrases. Echoes and influences of some of the other seventeenth century poets, especially Robert Herrick, are also traceable in the long poem. But the resemblances cannot be stretched too far, and it is only in a limited sense that we can look upon Patmore as the nineteenth century representative of the Metaphysical poets. His cast of mind is his own and much of the occasional flavour of the Metaphysicals in *The Angel* is the result of assimilation. Patmore's characteristic attitude to Nature and the human body and his insistence on their sacramental character, his celebration of divine love in terms of the images of earthty love, are what he owes ultimately to the Middle Ages and his Catholic faith.

The structural scheme of *The Angel*, involving division of verse into Preludes and Idylls, reveals Patmore's artistic resourcefulness. The Preludes offer psychological comments on the moods and mysteries of love, and also, occasionally, provide mystical interpretation of the nature and significance of nuptial love. The poetry of the Preludes largely exemplifies what Herbert Read characterizes as "a complex fusion of phantasy and wit.[13] The Idylls are comparatively descriptive in character, furnishing all the details that make up the story. *The Victories of Love* follows the same octosyllabic iambic measure but the quatrain is now replaced by the couplet. The division of verse into Preludes and Idylls is given up in *The*

Victories and the narrative is cast into the epistolary form. The number of characters, besides those principally involved, is extended here. The epistolary form and the wider character range lend to the poem the complexion of a "novel in verse." The concluding Wedding Sermon outlines the poet's views on the spiritual significance of married love. Incidentally, it satisfied the Virtorian taste for moral exhortation.

The later poetry of Patmore, comprising the "irregular" odes included under *The Unknown Eros*, has been happily commented upon by most critics.[14] What is recognizably a significant advance in this poetry in the direction of poetic maturity and excellence, struck the Victorians, curiously, as a step in the reverse direction. They were impressed by the superficial qualities of *The Angel* and failed to understand the transcendental philosophy of the odes. Most of them were shocked by the mysticism of love they deal with. Patmore's blending of sensuous detail and religious feeling did not appeal to their Puritan sensibility.

Patmore was a conscious craftsman. His ideas about the nature of poetry, the role of the poet and the principles that should govern metrical composition, are elaborately expressed in his *Religio Poetae*, *Principles of Art* and the celebrated *Essay on English Metrical Law*. He conceives of the poet as "the perceiver of spiritual senses" and looks upon the Imagination as "the language of genius." In poetry he stresses the quality of "interior finish," which is related to the idea of organic form. He does not approve of excess and emphasizes "the point of rest" in art, qualities associated with the classical style. A progression in his critical thinking is revealed later in the emphasis he shifts from the realism of words to their symbolic function. Poetic language, he realized, should apprehend supersensual knowledge, making it necessary for the poet to seize upon symbols, parables and metaphors as his medium. It is these principles, derived largely from Coleridge's idea of "organic form," taken later to their logical conclusion in the symbolist doctorines, that attracted Herbert Read's attention and stimulated his special interest in the poet. Patmore directly acknowledges his debt to Coleridge for his views on the nature of poetry. It was in fact his serious think-

ing on the nature of poetry that led him towards the mystical lore of the Christian faith. The Patmore of the odes has assimilated the qualities of the models—the Metaphysicals largely—which he had finally come to value, and he has also put his own ideas about poetry into practice (though this meant turning his back upon easy success and popularity). His advance in the direction of compactness and cohesion is sufficiently noticeable here in contrast to the limitations and faults of his earlier poetry. The language of the odes is often incomparably compact. The lines are of irregular length, the variety of the metre revealing how freedom can be happily controlled. There is no stanzaic division; each poem is one unit and the length of lines varies from two to sixteen syllables each. The "beautifully, controlled free verse"[15] of the odes is recognized by Patmore's twentieth century admirers as a step in the direction of modern verse, if only a modest one as compared to the achievement of his friend, Hopkins. The odes establish Patmore's kinship with the Metaphysicals more importantly than the occasional things in *The Angel* and *The Victories*. The intelligence here often keeps pace with and reinforces the play of emotions though the fusion is not uniformly sustained. Considering the inner tension and profundity that characterize Donne's poetry, Patmore's achievement is not consistently of that standard. He uses the metaphysical manner "with a Victorian difference."[16]

BK I of *The Unknown Eros* comprises poems written mostly when Patmore's memory of his first wife's death was still fresh. An even proportion of concrete and abstract words, which reflect economy in their choice and use, distinguishes the language of these odes. Compactness, clarity and compulsiveness are its striking qualities. Imagery of the Metaphysical type intrudes into these poems quite markedly (as will be shown in the next chapter) and the human element, in terms of emotions of love, imparts meaning and significance to the mystical concepts presented. 'The Toys,' 'Tired Memory,' 'Azalea,' 'A Farewell' are among the superb odes of this section. In point of depth and intensity, they are a class by themselves. Consider, for example, the following lines from 'The Toys' :

So when that night I pray'd
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood,
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness'. (p. 366.)

Here is an all-too-human situation - the widower's predicament in understanding his motherless child and his remorse at having punished it. The situation symbolizes God's divine compassion and concern for his creatures, his charitable and forgiving disposition towards the follies of man. A proper parallel is established here between human and divine love.

The odes in BK II of *The Unknown Eros* are avowedly religious in theme. They are more mystical and transcendental in conception than the odes in BK I. Occasionally, their meaning is obscured by Patmore's private symbolism, e.g., his preoccupation with the sexual analogy in the 'Psyche Odes' where "there does not appear to be the same depth of passionate symbolism as we find in the religious poems of Donne and Crashaw."[17] The speculative and intellectual element does not seem to fuse here in expression. The fusion is however achieved significantly in 'To the Body,' for example. The meaning of the Incarnation is best suggested here through words rich in Biblical and mystical association and appropriate to the poet's purpose. The humanist in Patmore praises the body thus:

Creation's and Creator's crowning good;
Wall of Infinitude;
Foundation of the sky,
In heaven forecast
And long'd for from eternity,

> Though laid the last;
> Reverberating dome,
> Of music cunningly built home
> Against the void and indolent disgrace
> Of Unresponsive space;
> Little, sequester'd pleasure-house
> For God and for His Spouse; (p. 408.)

In *The Unknown Eros* Patmore puts the imaginative symbols of his religion, which he had earlier more explicitly employed for celebrating domestic love, to a different use—showing how the sexual relation symbolizes the spiritual. The persistent theme of the religious odes in BK II of *The Unknown Eros* relates to sexual union in Christian marriage, symbolizing God's love for the human soul. The earlier poetry dwells on the earthly embodiment of divine love. In the *Odes*, the transcendental significance of earthly love is emphasized. Patmore's familiarity with Swedenborgian concepts and images, more particularly the well-known principle of "correspondences" is quite evident here.[18] According to this principle, a "chain of symbols" or "identities" runs through all aspects of creation or, more precisely, every natural object corresponds to a spiritual object. The natural and the spiritual worlds are thus analogically linked so that all visible things have a spiritual meaning. In the 'Sponsa Dei' ode, the nuptial analogy is overtly sexual :

> What is this Maiden fair,
> The laughing of whose eye
> Is in man's heart renew'd virginity;
> Who yet sick longing breeds
> For marriage which exceeds
> The inventive guess of Love to satisfy
> With hope of utter binding, and of loosing endless dear despair? (p. 403.)

A religious theme presented and argued in a language that apparently smacked of sexuality did not appeal to Patmore's contemporaries who had earlier admired *The Angel*. He was

labelled as an "uxorious mystic" and lumped with Rossetti's "fleshly school of poetry."[19] But such criticism is based on a misconceived notion of how sacred themes should be treated in verse; it overlooks the symbolic significance of the sexual analogy of which Patmore made a bold use in his odes.

As mentioned earlier, Patmore admired and encouraged Francis Thompson. Yet his admiration for him was not extravagant or uncritical. While he recognized him as "a greater Crashaw," he did not shut his eyes to his imperfections as an artist. He disapproved of the "cheap sublimities" he came across in Thompon's earlier verse. An acquaintance with the work of the two poets leaves one in no doubt about Patmore's intellectual superiority over his younger contemporary. Patmore is a sound critic of the principles governing the poetic art. His thought is often profound and original, traceable as much to his assimilative scholarship as his own genius. His aesthetic and mystical insights are complementary (as is expected of a poet-mystic). His odes largely, and especially his collection of aphorisms entitled *The Rod, The Root and The Flower*, convince us of his insights. The distinguishing mark of Thompson is *exuberance* : the "surprises of his vocabulary, the wealth and vividness of his imagery."[20] Generally he is not deficient in the passion and intensity that often mark lyrical inspiration. Hopkins complained of a lack of emotional intensity in Patmore. Thompson's problem was to restrain his lyrical fervour. His verse appeals to us very powerfully when his lyrical energy has a devotional motivation and is directed and controlled by intelligence at the same time, which is unmistakeably seen in 'The Hound of Heaven.'

Thompson's faith and his involvement with themes of religious interest provide a strong link between him and the elder Catholic poet whom he revered. Yet, in relation to the Victorian age, the positions of the two poets are not identical. Patmore thus did not share the intellectual interests of his contemporaries. His political odes reveal how he made use of rhetoric and satire to lash at what he did not like about his age. Though he is unlike his contemporaries, he is not a romantic alienated from his period and society. Thompson's case is different. His suffering and sorrow, no less than his

individual temperament, seem to have bred and encouraged in him an exclusive self-absorption which, when he could direct it to a purpose, religious or aesthetic, flowered into poetic achievement. Critics are quick to observe that his drug addiction also contributed to his alienation inasmuch as he sought refuge in dreams and fantasies that colour his poetic vision. Chesterton, commenting on Thompson's estrangement from the main-stream of Victorian life, observes: "Perhaps the shortest definition of the Victorian Age is that he stood outside it'"[21] The knowledge of Thompson's addiction to opium seems to have led critics to emphasize those characteristics of his poetic vision which establish his kinship with other drug-addicts. M.H. Abrams thus links him with De Quincey, George Crabbe and Coleridge, in all of whom he traces the effects of opium visions.[22] Likewise, J.C. Reid, while not denying the religious element in Thompson's verse, is of the view that he "shares his vision with that of the stricken band which includes Poe, Mangan, De Quincey, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, even James Thomson, as well as Francis Thompson's own co-religionists, Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson."[23] Such observations are as superficial and one-sided as those which, pursuing almost an identical line of logic, deny a positive vision to Thompson, stressing his fondness for words and their tonal qualities. He is thus associated, as mentioned earlier, with the poets of the nineties who wrote verse under Pater's influence and sought little beyond a delight in sensation. It is inconceivable, however, that with his devotional fervour and a strong religious bent (not without an intellectual understanding of his creed), he could have subscribed to the Art for Art's sake school. Quite a number of his poems express "a positive vision of a realm of spiritual realities rather than a rejection of the world of everyday"[24] (as we will attempt to show in Chapter V).

Thompson's poems demand careful reading. This is particularly necessitated by his unusual vocabulary. His manner too is often idiosyncratic. Our failure to read him with care could mislead us into thinking that he has little originality and that his poetry is derivative or, at best, imitative. One cannot deny the fact of his literary borrowings. This is

inevitable in the case of a highly impressionable and assimilative mind such as Thompson's. In his early years, he became "an entranced reader of great literature." With his classical leanings and spiritual affinity with the Caroline poets, he was surely impressed by certain styles. But, on the whole, his originality is impressed on what he borrows. Paul Van K. Thomson, in his critical work on Thompson, pleads persuasively in support of the relevance of his poetry to the techniques practised and popularised by modern poets.[25] This view is endorsed in these terms in a review of Paul Thomson's work:

> It is in his bold exploration into symbolism, into the creation of new metres, a new poetic language, in the feeling for the metaphysical poets that Thompson anticipates the twentieth century.[26]

This is an interesting and challenging estimate, taking into account, specially, Thompson's ability to twist and shape language to suit his poetic needs (the stylistic aspect that will be considered in Chapter VI). The opposite view, such as that of J.C. Reid, stresses the tenuousness of Thompson's verse and its lack of a strong intellectual content that distinguishes modern poetry. A balanced view would not overlook the poet's creative use of language evidenced in some of his mystical verse.

Thompson's imagery is his chief attraction as a poet. Images occur throughout his poetry; strikingly opulent, they are often functional in character, integral to the very thinking process of the poet (as the study undertaken in the next chapter will attempt to show). We specially find images drawn from church ritual and the classical myths as the pervasive element in Thompson's verse. Critics have compared Thompson to Shelley in respect of the latter's fondness for imagery. To the extent the two visionary poets have a passion for the remote and the transcendental, the affinity is evident. In both, the imagery is suggestive of things unearthly. There is another quality which links the two : the faculty for myth-making. In many of his poems Thompson weaves images into myths of

his own (as, for example, in the 'Ode to the Setting Sun'). Further, he makes a more frequent use of the classical myths than Patmore in his poems devoted to Christian themes. These myths sometimes embody a knowledge of scientific facts—this is another characteristic Thompson shares with Shelley. Thompson, in fact, expressed his deep admiration for Shelley in the celebrated essay he wrote on him. Here is what he says of Shelley's mythopoeic faculty which is no less applicable to his own :

> Coming to Shelley's poetry, we peep over the wild mask of revolutionary metaphysics, and we see the winsome face of the child. Perhaps none of his poems is more purely and typically Shelleian than *The Cloud*, and it is interesting to note how essentially it springs from the faculty of make-believe. The same thing is conspicuous, though less purely conspicuous, throughout his singing. It is the child's faculty of make-believe raised to the nth power. He is still at play, save only that his play is such as manhood stops to watch and his playthings are those which the gods give their children. The universe is his box of toys.[27]

Both Patmore and the poets of the seventeenth century are believed to have influenced Thompson's style. The poet acknowledges his conscious cultivation of some of the qualities he prized in Patmore. The influence of the seventeenth century poets is also stamped distinctly on some of Thomspon's poems, but to say that he has assimilated the Metaphysical manner is far from true. His imitation of the Metaphysicals yields, no doubt, good results sometimes, convincing us of his feeling for their poetry. Prof. Saintsbury mentions specially 'The Fair Inconstant' in this regard. The following stanza of the poem, for example, has a distinct Metaphysical flavour :

> The rosy reflex of my heart
> Did thy pale cheek attire;
> And what I was, not what thou art,
> Did gazers-on admire.
> Go, and too late thou shalt confess
> I looked thee into loveliness![28] (p. 144.)

Thompson's paradoxes and fanciful comparisons (of the type used, for example, in 'The Mistress of Vision') remind us more of Crashaw than of Donne. His affinity with Crashaw is confirmed by the opulent imagery we come across in both the poets and the religious fervour which informs it.

Thompson quite often succeeds in conveying a mystical awareness of the spiritual realm with the help of his imagery. However, as a singer of divine love, he does not lean as heavily on images of earthly love (for a symbolic purpose) as Patmore. The sacred and the profane mix up less often in him than they do in his other co-religionist, Crashaw. Thompson's references to human love have often a Platonic or sacred significance. He celebrates it only to the extent it symbolizes the union of the soul with God. Thus the odes included under the title *Love in Dian's Lap* express Thompson's pure Platonic adoration of Mrs. Alice Meynell, the lady whom he revered and whom Patmore admired. In manner and conception, these poems remind us of Shelley's 'Epipsychidion' and Patmore's odes. There are, besides, many of Thompson's poems which dwell on the theme of poetic inspiration itself. Here he reveals his self-consciousness as a poet, a quality or habit peculiar to the poets of the present century. His reflections on the nature of poetry are, at the same time, concerned with the mystery and significance of life. He shapes his ideas and intuitions into a coherent symbolism suggesting a relationship between the poet and the seer who both read the mystery of life. 'The Mistress of Vision' (discussed further in Chapter V) is an excellent example of Thompson's poetry of this sort. Concerned with a poetic exploration of the realm of esoteric wisdom, its symbolism equally lends itself to an interpretation in Christian terms.

Of Thompson's poems, 'The Hound of Heaven' (discussed further in Chapter V) is most popular. A soul-stirring religious experience is rendered here into the language of mystic love. The fugitive human soul is shown struggling under the stress of the Divine chase until it finds ultimate refuge in the arms of "this tremendous Lover." 'In No Strange Land,' the poem discovered by Wilfred Meynell among Thompson's papers after the latter's

death, reveals the poet's ability to use the simplest language for saying very profound things. Here Thompson shows an intimate awareness of the invisible Kingdom. Many of his poems, however, express an acute and painful sense of estrangement from this Kingdom and show the poet struggling towards a state of spiritual peace.

NOTES

1 Batho and Dobree, *The Victorians and After, 1830-1914* (1938; third rev. ed., London : The Crescent Press, 1962), p. 24.
2 F.W. Bateson, *English Poetry and the English Language* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 79.
3 Charles Frederick Harrold, "The Oxford Movement : A Reconsideration" in *The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature*, ed. Joseph E. Baker (1950; rpt. New York : Russel and Russel, 1962), p. 35.
4 See Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 64-65.
5 Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (London : Methuen, 1961), p. xiii.
6 B. Ifor Evans, *English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century* (London : Methuen, 1933), p. 13.
7 Thus John Drinkwater observes about him : "Of all the great poets of his time he has hitherto been by far the least generally understood and appreciated." See his *Victorian Poetry* (London : Hodder and Stroughton Ltd., 1923), p. 118. Batho and Dobree express in effect the same opinion when they refer to him as "that unduly neglected poet Coventry Patmore." See *Victorians and After, 1830-1914*, p. 66.
8 Herbert Read, "Coventry Patmore," *Essays in Literary Criticism : Particular Studies* (London : Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 181.
9 J.C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore* (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 325.
10 Herbert Read, "Coventry Patmore," *Essays in Literary Criticism : Particular Studies*, p. 182.
11 All passages from Patmore's published poems, quoted in this study, are from *The Poems of Patmore*, ed. Frederick Page (London : O.U.P., 1949). The relevant page numbers are indicated within parenthesis immediately after the quotations.
12 About this Herbert Read observes : "It is a wit-writing of an extremely competent and felicitous kind, but is not, and perhaps never pretended to be, lyrical poetry of any emotional intensity". See *Essays in Literary Criticism : Particular Studies*, p. 186.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 191.
14 Herbert Read, Batho and Dobree, Frederick Page and others would rate Patmore as a major poet on the basis of his poetic achievement in the odes.
15 Batho and Dobree, *The Victorians and After, 1830-1914*, p. 66.
16 John Drinkwater, *Victorian Poetry*, p. 121.
17 J.C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 302.
18 This would further account for the point made earlier regarding the "modern" interest in Patmore (as Herbert Read's), the affinity seen between his principles and the symbolist doctrines.
19 F.L. Lucas quotes Houseman's uncomplimentary remark about the poet: "Nobody admires his best poetry enough, though stupid Papists may fancy they do. But I should say as little as possible about his nasty mixture of piety and concupiscence." See F.L. Lucas, *The Victorian Poets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948; rpt. Archon Books, 1966), p. 97.
20 T.H. Wright, *Fancis Thompson and his Poetry* (1927; rpt. London: George Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1969), p. 10.
21 *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913; rpt. London: O.U.P., 1966), p. 124.
22 *The Milk of Paradise: The Effect of Opium Visions on the Works of De Quincy, Crabbe, Francis Thompson and Coleridge* (1934; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970).
23 *Francis Thompson: Man and Poet* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 207.
24 Peter Butter, *Francis Thompson* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1961), p. 7.
25 *Francis Thompson: A Critical Biography* (1961; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1973), pp. 219-21.
26 Marjorie Thompson & B.C. Southam. "The Twentieth Century," *The Year's Work in English Studies*, 42 (1961), p. 256.
27 Francis Thompson, *Shelley: An Essay* (1909: London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1923), p. 45.
28 All passages from Thompson's published poems, quoted in this study, are from *Poems of Francis Thompson*, ed. T.L. Connolly (New York: Appleton Century-Crofts, 1941). The relevant page numbers are indicated within parenthesis immediately after the quotations.

3

Imagery and Symbolism

The study of imagery, an important instrument of poetic communication, has assumed considerable significance in modern criticism; this is evident from the many definitions of the term 'image' available to us today. If we look upon a poem itself as a "living image,"[1] it follows that the images the poem employs are well woven into its total pattern and not superimposed. Otherwise, they will not be functional in the poem nor will they have a pattern or significance of their own beyond serving the purpose of illustration or embellishment. It is generally seen that every poem "contains a pattern of imagery, and each image is itself, to varying extents, a pattern."[2]

The appeal of a poetic image often extends beyond the visual to the mind and the intellect, as suggested in Caroline Spurgeon's definition of the image, emphasizing the variety of its forms.[3] Hulme considered images as "the very essence of an intuitive language." But "his emphasis on the visual quality of all images has been outgrown."[4] With the modern preference for the kind of imagery used by the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, what we, above all, expect of the image is that it be a "verbal embodiment of thought and feeling."[5]

The term closely associated with 'image' is 'symbol.' Actually the two often shade into each other; opinions vary about their respective nature and significance. C. Day Lewis, at one extreme, emphasizes the multiple significance of the

poetic image, its connotative function as opposed to the denotative function of what he labels as the symbol. W.Y. Tindall maintains the other extreme position; the image, in his view, is a "principal kind" of 'symbol', the latter having a wider connotation and significance in terms of his definition.[6] On the whole, critical thinking and practice seem to be in favour of recognizing the terms 'image' and 'symbol' as related, sometimes even interchangeable.[7]

It is important to bear in mind that the relation or correspondence between a symbol and the thing symbolized by it is never altogether arbitrary or conventional. The literary symbol particularly is also an image in its own right, its connections with what it signifies going beyond any fixed cultural associations. Likewise, traditional symbolism is "never a closed system, for its terms are fluid and susceptible of different applications, but it is always precise."[8] It is, therefore, wrong to assume that symbols can yield up all their meaning and lend themselves to a definitive interpretation. In fact, the significance of poetic symbolism lies in the quality of its suggestiveness; it is only *partly* revelatory.

An important kind of image, charged with deep emotional significance and reflecting the behaviour of a community through its long cultural history, is the achetype or primordial image mentioned by psychologists like Freud and Jung. Its use and significance are often discussed by the myth critics, who maintain that ancient myths embody archetypal images, which persist in "the collective unconscious." These often intrude into poetry and take on symbolic significance.

It is appropriate here to specify why the use of symbolism in the mystical poetry of Patmore and Thompson cannot be equated with the practice of the French symbolists. The symbols employed by the latter were private rather than universal or communal in association. Their aestheticism, although concerned with Ideal Beauty beyond the senses, lacked a religious inspiration or motivation. It seemed to delight in a withdrawal from the compulsions and moral concerns of life and, in that sense, C.M. Bowra takes it to be "a mystical form of Aestheticism."[9] At any rate, it had little to do with the traditional or universal kind of symbolism.

associated with mysticism of the sacred type such as Christian mysticism, exemplified in Patmore and Thompson. As we shall see, the imagery and symbolism they employ in the service of a mystical meaning, though Catholic in inspiration, are generally universal in appeal.

It is further important for us here (while talking about mysticism and poetry in the same breath) to bear in mind that "poetry concerned with mysticism does not present us with mystical experience as it is but is constantly rebodying it and bringing it back into the realms of nature."[10] Thus St. John of the Cross, in his accounts of the experience of mystical union, has, paradoxically and inevitably, to fall back upon the images of earthly love. Perhaps, the language of symbolism is the only medium of communication available to the mystical poet or the articulate mystic. The transcendent is often conceived under forms and symbols founded on sound analogies grounded in the truth of Divine immanence. Evelyn Underhill confirms this :

> When we pass to the mystical poets, we find nearly all their best efforts are due to their extra-ordinary genius for indirect, suggestive imagery. . . . artistic sidelong representations of the mystic's direct apprehension of the Infinite on, so to speak, its cosmic and impersonal side.[11]

Further, to be effective and functional in mystical poetry, images should not be just traditional or conventional; they should possess "freshness, intensity and evocative power," the qualities which C. Day Lewis associates with the poetic image.[12]

Before discussing the images and symbols in some of the poems of Patmore and Thompson, selected for this study, it is worthwhile considering what each of them thought about the significance of poetic imagery and symbolism. We start with Patmore, who was a committed theorist and a conscious practitioner of the poetic art as his critical essays reveal. In his early poetry, he stressed the realism of words in order to achieve precision in his descriptions. This quality is specially noticeable in *The Angel in the House*. However, a symbolic

intention can also be seen as implicit here. As Patmore progressed in mystical thought, he came to realize fully the importance of symbolic use of language. The ideas of Coleridge and Swedenborg particularly shaped his views in this regard. For Coleridge, a symbol is characterized by "the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it communicates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity of which it is the representative."[13] Coleridge conceives of sacraments as symbols "stereoscopic" in character, "consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors."[14] They involve "an encounter of man with God."[15]

Swedenborg's ideas reflected a synthesis of "ancient wisdom and contemporary thought." As mentioned in the preceding chapter, his well-known principle of correspondences appealed to Patmore considerably. It strengthened his belief in the sacramental significance of Nature and the human body and influenced his views on wedded love. With his conversion to Catholicism, followed by his wider reading in mysticism and Christian theology, Patmore attached supreme significance to symbolism as an excellent medium for conveying supersensual knowledge. In his well-known essay, 'Love and Poetry,' he maintains that "parables and symbols are the only possible means of expressing realities which are clear to perception but dark to understanding."[16] Writing in the same vein elsewhere, he observes: "Some light of their [of the prophets and the mystics] meaning forces itself through the, in most cases, purposely obscure cloud of their words and imagery; but when, by chance, a glimpse of the disc itself is caught, it is surprisingly strong, bright and intelligible."[17]

To Patmore symbolism was not opposed to realism. The visible always held for him the key to the mystery at the heart of things. With Coleridge he persistently held that the "things which are unseen are known by the things which are seen." The well-known line "Let not my heart forget the glories my eyes have seen" speaks of the sacramental significance the senses had for Patmore. His sacramental perception of the world of sensory experience is revealed in his use of natural and erotic images.

In content and metrical form, Patmore's odes are distinguishable from *The Angel* and the earlier poems. Critical opinion appears generally to have over-emphasized the qualitative distinction of the odes to suggest that it owed itself to a radical change in Patmore's inspiration and method. Ifor Evans, for example, states : "In his early poetry Patmore had avoided imagery, and had even suggested that the highest poetry existed without it. Into the odes imagery intrudes, an imagery like that of the metaphysical poets, original, difficult, intellectual."[18] That such imagery is conspicuous by its absence in Patmore's early poetry is, however, far from true. The fact is that in the odes the imagery is consciously used in the service of mystical symbolism while in *The Angel* its use is largely descriptive, the symbolic element being only germinally present.[19] However, both in *The Angel* and the odes, the images can be shown to approximate to a consistent type and pattern, although the odes are structurally different and also carry the impress of Catholic mystical theology. More than anything else, the recurrent images illustrate the unity of Patmore's work and it is to them that we must turn our attention.

The image of nuptial love, often embodying the concept of sexual polarity, is all-pervasive in Patmore's work. We find this image in nearly all his poems, assuming a variety of forms in different contexts and yet pointing to the same divine mystery. Let us look at a few of the many forms it takes in *The Angel*. Here is nuptial love seen in the form of a "germ", having the potentiality of an organic evolution and transformation into a higher love, both human and divine :

> This little germ of nuptial love,
> Which springs so subtly from the sod,
> The root is, as my song shall prove,
> Of all our love to man and God. (p. 96.)

Throughout alive to the divine mystery of wedded love, Patmore sees a universal significance in the contrasts it involves. An appropriate analogy is presented to show the nuptial relation as exemplifying an aspect of cosmic harmony :

> Our lifted lives at last shall touch
> That happy goal to which they move;
> Until we find, as darkness rolls
> Away, and evil mists dissolve,
> The nuptial contrasts are the poles
> On which the heavenly spheres revolve. (p. 72.)

The poet is always at pains to remind us of the essential divinity of married love. At the same time, he takes delight in dwelling on its earthly joys. Gifted with the insight of a psychologist, and a wit reminiscent of the Metaphysicals, particularly Donne, he goes into the minute details of courtship. A woman, exercising her spell on the lover of her choice, is depicted as being herself the helpless victim of love; the image of sexual duality, which is a universal symbol in Patmore, is repeated here :

> Fatal in force, yet gentle in will,
> Defeats, from her, are tender pacts,
> For, like the kindly lodestone, still
> She's drawn herself by what she attracts. (p. 91.)

In the first two lines, we have a conceit involving antithesis and the use of terms from warfare. The image in the next two lines is drawn from physical science. It is significant that Patmore did not see any incompatibility between science and spirituality; he affirmed that the greatest use of natural science lay in supplying analogies to the poet.[20] The image of the planetary order which is contained in the Prelude entitled 'Joy and Use' shows how his insight combines the perception of a scientist with that of a metaphysician. It is a quality which he seems interestingly to share with Swedenborg. The Prelude presents a contrast between love sanctified by marital discipline and profane love, which leads to ruination and chaos. The last four lines present suitable analogies :

> His sorry raptures rest destroys;
> To live, like comets, they must roam;
> On settled poles turn solid joys,
> And sunlike pleasures shine at home. (p. 175.)

Another Prelude, 'The Chace,' employs an extended metaphor—the pursuit of the female by the lover shown in the active masculine role. The whole course of premarital courtship, described as a game of Love-chase, is illumined by fine touches of psychology. The female is shown in the paradoxical role of desiring "so much to be admired," yet fleeing from the "dreaded lover." At one point the chase is given visual, dramatic representation :

> He comes about her like a mist,
> With subtle, swift, unseen increase;
> And then, unlook'd for, strives amain
> Some stroke that frightens her to death,
> And grows all harmlessness again,
> Ere she can cry, or get her breath. (p. 132.)

The concluding lines of the lyric present an image suggestively sexual :

> But still she flies, should she be won,
> It must not be believed or thought
> She yields; she's chased to death, undone,
> Surprised, and violently caught. (p. 134.)

As pointed out earlier, *The Unknown Eros* odes look different from the earlier poems in form and style. But the Preludes in *The Angel* suggest unmistakably the future poet of the odes. The textual examples given above demonstrate well that the poet made use of imagery in *The Angel*, the poem on wedded love. As is further evident, the images often embody Patmorean concepts rather than merely illustrate them. This is particularly true of the imagery that has been employed in the Preludes, which provide psychological comments on the narrative parts of *The Angel*. The odes, however, indicate a definite advance in the direction of symbolism, the poet making a perceptive and skilful use of imagery involving mystical concepts. When the images relate to the natural world, or to human love in familiar situations, the symbolism is easy to understand. This is true of the odes contained in BK I of *The*

Unknown Eros. In some of the subsequent odes obscurity inevitably creeps in where Patmore is not able to "submerge his private symbolism"[21] in the traditional symbolism of his religion.

The image of nuptial love continues to be central and all-embracing in the odes; at times it assumes an overtly sexual complexion, as in the *Psyche Odes*. Patmore's constant effort, as observed earlier, appears to be to emphasize the sanctity of Christian marriage as a symbol of divine love and, conversely, to translate the love of God for the human soul into terms of the husband's for his bride. In the more transcendental odes, where the proportion of human images dwindles, the symbolism is not always easy to grasp.

We now turn to the sequence of three odes—'Saint Valentine's Day,' 'Wind and Wave' and 'Winter' which make use of Nature symbolism. Each of them is concerned with a particular season which represents, analogically, the corresponding phase of the experience of love. 'Saint Valentine's Day' celebrates love in terms of natural images associated with spring :

> O, Baby Spring,
> That flutter'st sudden 'neath the breast of Earth
> A month before the birth;
> Whence is the peaceful poignancy,
> The joy contrite,
> Sadder than sorrow, sweeter than delight,
> That burthens now the breath of everything,
> Though each one sighs as if to each alone
> The cherish'd pang were known? (p. 351.)

The poem employs a subtle analogy : warm ecstatic love is compared to spring while virginity, which demands a severe restraint on love, is analogized to winter. The terms related are seen to fuse in the poem so that we have a composite picture of joyful love and gay spring. The transformation that the experience of love undergoes, as virginity yields place to mature love, is made vivid in terms of the change in the external features of the earth as spring follows winter. The

concluding stanza illustrates the fusion mentioned :

> Well dost thou, Love, to celebrate
> The noon of thy soft ecstasy,
> Or e'er it be too late,
> Or e'er the Snowdrop die ! (p. 352.)

The other poem 'Wind and Wave' makes a direct use of sexual symbolism. It presents a picture of the summer sea exposed to the sunshine, the little breezes causing gentle ripples on its surface. As the storm gathers momentum, the whole sea is rocked to the bottom, the waves dashing against the beach. The interaction of 'Wind' and 'Wave' symbolizes the fulfilment of the experience of love in marriage : beginning in gentle 'ripples' and culminating in the 'tide' :

> And so the whole
> Unfathomable and immense
> Triumphing tide comes at the last to reach
> And burst in wind-kiss'd splendours on the deaf'ning beach,
> Where forms of children in first innocence
> Laugh and fling pebbles on the rainbow'd crest
> Of its untired unrest. (p. 354.)

The third of the sequence, 'Winter', abounds in natural images. The winter scene is presented with a careful attention to detail. The silence and apparent suspension of life and movement in the season are described as "not death but plenitude of peace." The calm of mystical contemplation is suggested as marking the culmination of human love. Renunciation seems the price one has to pay for the riches of "peace."

We move to BK II of *The Unknown Eros*, and study the images in 'To the Body' and in the little sequence of the *Psyche Odes*. Through the ages, the human body has been looked upon as a *divinely* inhabited cosmos and used as a sacred symbol in many cultures. More particularly the devotional mystic attaches considerable significance to this symbol-

To his perception the human form reveals itself as "Jacob's ladder" leading to God. The Christian mystic, with his awareness that "God created man in His own image," strengthened by his belief in the divine Incarnation, lays a special claim to this perception. 'To the Body' gives poetic expression to the same awareness. It employs a sequence of architectural images, which serve to project the human body as the 'temple' of God:

> Creation's and Creator's crowning good;
> Wall of Infinitude;
> Foundation of the sky,
> In Heaven forecast
> And long'd for from eternity,
> Though laid the last;
> Reverberating dome,
> Of music cunningly built home
> Against the void and indolent disgrace
> Of unresponsive space;
> Little, sequestered pleasure-house
> For God and for His Spouse; (p. 408.)

The body described as "Little, sequester'd pleasure-house/For God and for His Spouse" brings to our mind the delights of nuptial love and, at the same time, suggests the 'rapture' a mystic is supposed to experience in the sanctuary of his soul. Most of the images used are evidently concrete, particularly the concluding "pleasure-house" image. The intellectual quality of the images, their inter-relatedness and progression enable the poet to pin down his meaning in a manner reminiscent of the Metaphysical poets.

Patmore, as Gosse maintains, believed that "the Pagan myths, even when they seem gross and earthly, contain the pure elements of living Christian doctrine in symbol."[22] In the three *Psyche Odes*, he contrives to employ figures from Greek mythology, Eros and Psyche, to establish the nuptial analogy. He relinquishes the Nature symbolism he had exploited in some of the odes of BK I (to elaborate the nuptial theme and bring out its transcendental significance). Instead he

makes an audacious use of the sexual analogy, presented in terms of the pains and raptures experienced by Psyche, who, according to the myth, is secretly visited by Eros at night. The imagery used here follows closely the form and pattern of the sexual imagery we are familiar with in St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa. Both the saints have given an account of their love for God in the language of the 'Song of Songs.' The experience of the ecstatic union known to the mystics (when they attain the highest reach of contemplation) is suggested in the poem through the images of physical contact between the figures of the Greek myth. Love between God and the human soul, conceived as a spousal relation, is a daring symbol that has got assimilated to the language of mysticism. In the ode 'Eros and Psyche', Psyche's reply to Eros, when the latter is about to depart, is couched in a language that clalls up the 'dark night' images we owe to St. John of the cross :

> Thou leav'st me now, like, to moon at dawn,
> A little, vacuous world alone in air.
> I will not care !
> When dark comes back my dark shall be withdrawn! (p. 424.)

Elsewhere in the same ode, we find several images, overtly sexual but loaded with suggestion, which illumine rare mystical concepts. R.C. Zaehnar, commenting on the appropriateness of the sexual relation symbolizing the spiritual (showing the human soul in the feminine role) observes : "The sexual image is, moreover, particularly apt since the man both envelops and penetrates the woman, is both within and without her, just as God who dwells at the deepest point of the soul also envelops it and covers it with His infinite love."[23] Psyche's words spoken to Eros suggest the same mystical union :

> Kiss me again, thy Wife and Virgin too!
> O Love that, like a rose,
> Deckest my breast with beautiful repose,
> Kiss me again, and clasp me round the heart,
> Till fill'd with thee am I
> As the cocoon is with the butterfly ! (p. 420.)

We now turn to Thompson. He was both "fascinated and sometimes plagued"[24] by imagery--a gift so abundant in him that it needed control and direction. As he progressed in the poetic art (especially when he came under Patmore's influence), he realized that he must tame his enthusiasm for imagery. His *New Poems* reflect the restraint he had cultivated in deference to the suggestions of the elder poet. The gain "in art and chastity of style," which Thompson affirmed and attributed to his new inspiration, could not, it seems, make up for his feeling that he had also "lost in fire and glow."[25] Except when marred by extravagance, imagery continued to be the chief attraction of his verse; what the hostile critic saw as its fault was only "the splendid fault of excess." Thompson earnestly believed that imagery is of vital significance to the poet concerned with the realm of spiritual realities. In 'Anima Simplisitas,' an unsigned manuscript of his, he states:

> With the poet of the higher planes, imagery is entirely needful for expression. For the unaccustomed perceptions proper to these planes will not be otherwise expressed. I use no paradox in saying, that for such a poet imagery *is* direct language.[26]

In Thompson's early poetry imagery is very conspicuous. However, the imagery occasionally confounds the reader and leads to obscurity when it is not directed by an intellectual purpose. This is apparent, for example, in some parts of the *Sister Songs*. However, through his contact with Patmore and access to Swedenborgian ideas, Thompson too came to attach importance to a symbolic use of imagery. Earlier, he had felt specially drawn to the externals of the liturgical image. His perception of the underlying significance of sacred images deepened gradually. This is true of a visionary mystic also; fine perceptions usually occur to him under the ceremonial garb of sacred signs and symbols. As he advances as a mystic, he penetrates to their hidden core and grasps their spiritual meaning. Thompson could, in time, appreciate a ritual as "poetry addressed to the eye." Correspondingly, Catholic ritual provided the essential stuff for his poems; it enriched

his poetry and was itself enlivened by his poetic imagination. What he came gradually to value as symbolism had thus its basis in his earlier fondness for the ritual for its own sake. The poetry of *New Poems* reveals a progression on the intellectual side in terms of a conscious use of symbolism. In 'A Prose Fragment of the Analogies between God, Nature, Man and the Poet,' another unsigned manuscript, Thompson, drawing a distinction between "fancy" and "imagination," observes :

> This is the real distinction; fancy detects resemblances, imagination identifies : Herein lies the reason why a deeply imaginative poet is driven to express his perceptions through the shrouded language of symbolism. For in Nature herself, all things mean each other, and one thing means every thing. . . . Man is a symbol, Nature a metaphor, heaven and earth are written in hieroglyphs. The universe is a metonymy for God.[27]

This is a fine synthesis of Coleridgean and Swedenborgian concepts pointing to Thompson's mature thinking on the nature and value of poetic symbolism. Many of his New Poems confirm the assimilation of this thinking to actual poetic practice; they make a subtle and skilful use of symbolism at once traditional and universal.

Both Patmore and Thompson have been compared and linked by critics with the Divine poets of the seventeenth century. The affinity has been pointed out in respect of their adaptations of the Metaphysical manner, apart from the similarity of themes. Their use of the poetic image has specially prompted this comparison. In this regard, J.C. Reid would recognize Patmore, rather than Thompson, as a Victorian descendant of the Metaphysicals. He stresses the intellectual quality of the imagery in Patmore's odes. As regards Thompson, he sees a strong affinity between him and the Decadents, repudiating the suggestion that Thompson is in any important way linked with the Metaphysical poets. This view apparently looks upon Thompson's 'imitations' of the Caroline poets, very striking at places, as merely contrived. As pointed out earlier, it is easier to link him with Crashaw with whom he has gene-

rally been compared; the exuberance of liturgical images in Thompson is an important pointer to the affinity. Crashaw is often the poet of sensation and emotion, yet capable of intellectual subtlety. The intellectual element in his poems is generally subdued and the logic of thought obscured by a welter of images. In Thompson's case also emotional intensity rather than an intellectual apprehension is striking. This is reflected in the very quality of his imagery. However, in many of his poems the images are functional and woven into a pattern, their progression revealing a scheme of thought. They present the unity which Eliot sees as the "fusion of thought and feeling." Frank Kermode merely refers to Thompson's awareness of this quality of Metaphysical poetry and his eagerness to find its evidence in his own work.[28] Evidently, he has based his view on what is contained in Thompson's lines which occur in one of his letters addressed to Alice Meynell. That Thompson anticipates Eliot is very evident :

> Yet 'feeling' is too determinate and distinctive a term : nay, her state is too sub-intellectual for the term to be adequate. It is sensoriness instinct with mind; it is mind subdued to sensoriness. She feels in her brain. She thinks at her periphery. It is blended twilight of intellect and sensation; it is the crepuscular of thought.[29]

Thompson could not write this without being aware, as a practitioner, of what we understand today by a unified sensibility in its bearing on the poetic image.

We now turn to a few of the images in Thompson's verse, especially those marked by a pattern of recurrence in related contexts, pointing to their symbolic use and significance. One such image is the paradisal image handled skilfully in 'The Making of Viola,' an early poem devoted to children. The poem bears clear marks of the pre-Raphaelite influence; it pictures heaven in Christian terms. The imagery used is ethereal in suggestion and very appropriate to the theme—the rearing of a child's 'soul' in heaven. The metaphors of workmanship drawn from different skills such a weaving, spinning, scooping, tinting, etc., lend vividness and corporeality to the

perception of man's divine origin, of the divinity native to the child. The images used in the poem have a delicate sensuousness about them. They remind us of Blake picturing 'innocence.' Here is an illustration :

> Cast a star therein to drown,
> Like a torch in cavern brown,
> Sink a burning star to drown
> Whelmed in eyes of Viola. (p. 12.)

We shall return to the paradisal image when we discuss its subtler use, directed towards achieving a complex symbolism, in 'The Mistress of Vision.' Meanwhile we consider Thompson's use of Nature symbolism. It is interesting to look at the sun-image as it occurs in the 'Ode to the Setting Sun' and, later, in the 'Orient Ode.' The imagery in both the poems is mythological. Thompson's handling of scientific facts, as a source for poetic analogies, reveals a subtlety and perception even excelling Patmore's. The symbolism in the two poems unites a Pagan response to Nature with a Catholic awareness of the meaning of the divine Incarnation. The language of the 'Orient Ode' is more liturgical, reflecting Thompson's deeper involvement with Christian symbolism (under Patmore's inspiration). The use of the sun-image as a symbol is recurrent in Thompson; it "leaps to the eye in half of his poems.[30] In the two odes, the poet reads a Christian meaning into the sunset; it reminds him of Crucifixion. The prospect of a fresh sunrise signifies to him the promise of Resurrection or re-Incarnation. Thompson does not lose sight of the significance the sun had for the Pagans. But, above all, it is to him an emblem of the Christ-consciousness, yet described in terms that are a part of the language of universal symbolism. The last stanza of the 'Ode to the Setting Sun' dwells on the likeness between the sun's glory and that of Christ; the description could equally apply to the sun-god of the pantheist :

> If with exultant tread
> Thou foot the Eastern sea,
> Or like a golden bee

Sting the west to angry red,
Thou dost image, thou dost follow
That King-Maker of Creation,
Who, ere Hellas hailed Apollo,
Gave thee, angel-god, thy station;
Thou art of Him a type memorial. (p. 68.)

The following description of the sun in the 'Orient Ode' does not merely have a Christian appeal but exemplifies Nature mysticism in general :

Thou art the incarnated Light
Whose Sire is aboriginal, and beyond
Death and resurgence of our day and night;
From him is thy vicegerent wand
With double potence of the black and white.
Giver of Love, and Beauty, and Desire,
The terror, and the loveliness, and purging,
The deathfulness and lifefulness of fire ! (p. 165.)

Commenting on Thompson's use of the sun-image, Father Connolly states : "In Thompson's use of the sun as a mystical symbol of Christ there is much to remind one of Swedenborg's *The Divine Love and Wisdom*, where he likens the emanations of heat and light from their common source, the sun, to the emanations of Love and Truth from their common source, God."[31] The solar symbol, as a matter of fact, has a universal validity. It represents Being as opposed to Becoming, which is symbolized by the moon. "The sun does not share in becoming; although always in motion, the sun remains unchangeable; its form is always the same."[32] Thus we see that Thompson's Catholic background does not come in the way of his poetic symbolism being assimilable to a universal system of analogy.

We consider next the poem 'Contemplation' which is among the best nature poems in English poetry. Here Thompson is at his best in handling imagery devoted to a natural description; accuracy of detail is combined with an underlying content of deep symbolic meaning. The poem is

free from exuberance and shows the poet in perfect command of his medium. Though written under Patmore's 'discipelship,' it is more obviously reminiscent of Wordsworth and looks back to the remoter Vaughan. An affinity with Hopkins, in discovering "God's grandeur everywhere in nature," is equally evident. The mood of nature, captured in its detail, has a one-to-one correspondence with the state of the soul absorbed in mystical contemplation, which is here hardly distinguishable from poetic contemplation as conceived by Thompson. This should remind us of Patmore's description of calm contemplation as "not death but plenitude of peace" in 'Winter,' the poem we have already considered. Towards the end of Thompson's poem, Wordsworth particularly comes to our mind. Here the contemplative state is almost imagistically rendered :

> He scarcely frets the atmosphere
> With breathing, and his body shares
> The immobility of rocks;
> His heart's a drop-well of tranquillity;
> His mind more still is than the limbs of fear,
> And yet its unperturbed velocity
> The spirit of the simoom mocks. (p. 159.)

Let us now discuss the use of the paradisal image in 'The Mistress of Vision,' which opens the sequence entitled 'Sight and Insight' in *New Poems*. It exemplifies a fine combination of poetry and mysticism achieved through the use of symbolism. The mysticism we notice here is visionary; it has none of the mistiness that marks pseudo-mysticism. It owes its clarity to "the marvellous concentration of imagery" in the first nine stanzas and to the supporting framework supplied by the Catholic dogma. The symbolism made use of here can be appreciated at several levels of significance. The poem, as Thompson claimed, is a fantasy. Romantic to a high degree, in both setting and atmosphere, it reminds us of Coleridge and Shelley. Its distinction, however, lies in the quality of the vision it communicates : the wonderful and the mysterious are impregnated with a mystical meaning. The paradisal element

is provided by the "lady of fair weeping" and the mystic garden in which she dwells. The lady and the garden could be identified as archetypal images. The garden "as a place for meditation in which a paradisal state may be regained is common to Eastern as well as Western mysticism."[33] As regards the lady, she is a wisdom figure, a recurrent *motif* in literature and identifiable also as the "theophanic figure through whom the manifestation of God takes place"[34] (the feminine form celebrated especially in the poetry of Sufi mystics). In Christian terms the lady is none other than the Blessed Virgin and the garden she inhabits is the realm of Grace. A parallel interpretation, in pure literary terms, could see the garden as the "realm of the highest poetic achievement" and the lady as the "personification of poetry."[35] The pain experienced in the pursuit of either realm, by the saint and the poet alike, is the sacrificial pain without which the attainment of spiritual insight is impossible. Stanza III of the poem, reproduced below, describes the lady, her dwelling and her occupation :

> The Lady of fair weeping,
> At the garden's core,
> Sang a song of sweet and sore
> And the after-sleeping,
> In the land of Luthany, and the tracts of Elenore. (p. 151.)

Another poem in which Thompson dwells on the theme of pain as essential to the attainment of "Ultimate Paradise" is 'By Reason of Thy Law.' Biblical in inspiration, its images suggest the Metaphysical manner and recall St. John of the Cross's experience of the 'dark night of the soul.' In form and conception, the poem bears some affinity with Patmore's ode to 'Pain.' Thompson's use of imagery borrowed from falconry is effective in rendering an introvert experience of the mystical type into objective terms, vivid to plain understanding. The analogy presented suggests that the spiritual deprivation through which the God-seeker must pass is only a blessing in disguise; the 'dark night' holds the promise of illumination:

> From food of all delight
> The heavenly Falconer my heart debars,

And tames with fearful glooms
The haggard to His call;
Yet sometimes comes a hand, sometimes a voice withal,
And she sits meek now, and expects the light. (p. 160.)

Patmore employs parallel imagery drawn from archery (a similarity that does not seem to have been specifically noticed so far) in his poem 'Faint Yet Pursuing,' which has an analogous theme—a painful sense of remoteness from the ultimate goal experienced by the spiritual aspirant before he realises Grace:

Heroic Good, target for which the young
Dream in their dreams that every bow is strung,
And, missing, sigh
Unfruitful, or as disbelievers die,
Thee having miss'd, I will not so revolt,
But lowlier shoot my bolt,
And lowlier still, if still I may not reach,
And my proud stomach teach
That less than highest is good, and may be high. (p. 385.)

Of Thompson's images of human love, the maternal image is the most favourite of him. It assumes many characteristic forms—"the breast, the womb, the sucking child, the solacing mother."[36] In regard to his use of the maternal image, critics have pointed out his affinities with Crashaw. The poet's pre-occupation with maternal love has also been subjected to a Freudian interpretation.[37] What is significant, as we have already maintained, is that the mystic faced with the difficulty of communication has generally depended on the language of human love. The types of love-relationship that human beings know of are those between man and woman, between parent and child, between master and servant, between friend and friend, and so on. The mystic of the communicative type has been found using one or more of these relationships to articulate his experience of divine love. Conversely, a parallel attitude may be cultivated by a devotional mystic, in relation to a personal God, as a stepping stone to his spiritual fulfilment. In the terminology of Hindu mysticism, these relationships are

spoken of as the various *Bhawas—Madhuri* (erotic), *Dasa* (servant-master), *Mitra* (friendship), *Vatasalya* (parent-child), etc. These *Bhawas* were *experienced* by many mystics in India and the writing of poetry for most of them was a kind of spiritual *Sadhana*, not necessarily motivated by the communicative need. Thompson's attitude to God can be seen in the light of these relationships or *Bhawas*. In him love generally appears as that of child for mother and *vice versa*. His singing of human love, as, for example, his poetic adoration of Alice Meynell in 'Love in Dian's Lap,' shows him as a child fondly praising the Divine Mother. In respect of this kind of mystical love, Thompson is comparable to the Catholic Crashaw rather than the Anglican Herbert who more often addresses God as the heavenly Father or Master. The paternal image, a Father figure, is, however, used by Thompson, and handled with extraordinary success, in 'The Hound of Heaven.' The symbolism of Love-chase, a familiar mystical theme, is boldly employed by the poet here, the well-known roles of the pursuer and the pursued being reversed. The mystery of divine grace is revealed at the end of the spiritual drama, when the seeker finds himself in the arms of the kindly Father. The chase is then seen in the right perspective; the 'flight' of the human soul turns out to be a flight no more, but a significant step towards union with the Divine.

Finally, we turn to Thompson's use of the erotic image. Instances of his treatment of love between man and woman, or its sacred type in married love, are not many. There are, however, two sequences of poems (in the definitive edition of his poetical work) which are believed to have owed their inspiration to his actual experience of love for a woman. Unlike Patmore, he laid great emphasis on the ascetic aspect of spiritual life as advocated by Christianity. He never prized human love for its own sake. It was only with the passage of time that he came to recognize the reasonableness of Patmore's insistent use of nuptial love as an analogy. On the whole, human love was important to him only as a precursor of divine love. It is, however, interesting to see how well, when he chooses, he can handle erotic imagery. We may

refer to his use of it in 'Arab Love Song.' The poem can be appreciated as a love lyric. Read at another level of significance, it is seen to involve Christian symbolism. The "Arab" of the poem is then none other than Christ, the moon being the familiar symbol for the Virgin. The image of the "red pavilion" in the last stanza is particularly fascinating and appropriate:

> Leave thy father, leave thy mother
> And thy brother;
> Leave the black tents of thy tribe apart!
> Am I not thy father and thy brother,
> And thy mother?
> And thou—what needest with thy tribe's black tents
> Who hast the red pavilion of heart? (p. 111.)

NOTES

1 See C. Day Lewis, *The Poetic Image* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1961), p. 99.

2 Robin Skelton, *The Poetic Pattern* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 90.

3 Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells* (1935; New Impression. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

4 Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*, p. 127.

5 William York Tindall, *The Literary Symbol* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 105.

6 *Ibid.* pp. 12-13.

7 The essential thing about the image is that it can be directly apprehended. When, however, an image is charged with associations or loaded with a complex of meanings, traditional or otherwise, it could be called a symbol. Austin Warren, who does not see a qualitative difference between the two, defines symbolism as "imagery understood to imply a conceptual meaning." See "Symbolism in Crashaw" in *Seventeenth Century English Poetry*, ed. W.R. Keast (New York: O.U.P. 1962), p. 254.

A symbol is generally culture-bound; yet there are instances of symbols which are natural and universal rather than communal or private. That is why it is possible for poems, which make use of the relatively universal kind of symbolism, to be understood and enjoyed by readers all over the world.

8 Gai Eaton, *The Richest Vein : Eastern Tradition and Modern Thought* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), p. 45.

9 *The Heritage of Symbolism* (London: Macmillan, 1943), p. 3.
10 Mark Schorer, *William Blake : The Politics of Vision* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 85.
11 *The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays* (1920; rpt. New York: A.M.S. Press, 1976), pp. 70-72.
12 *The Poetic Image*, p. 40.
13 Quoted in Stephen Pricket, *Romanticism and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 18.
14 Quoted in J. Robert Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 6.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
16 Coventry Patmore, *Principles in Art, Religio Poetae and Other Essays* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1913), p. 336.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
18 *English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century*, p. 171.
19 Frederick Page is the first critic to have stressed the essential unity and continuity of Patmore's work, asserting that it "does not fall into two independent parts, the one containing and concluding with *The Angel* and the other containing the Odes." (See *Patmore: A Study in Poetry*, p. 119.) He draws attention to what he sees as the connecting links, in terms of thematic affinity, between *The Angel* and the odes. J.C. Reid, in his valuable critical work on the poet, has built up further on this approach. He sees both a progression and an unbroken continuity in Patmore's work as a whole (not excluding the prose). Though he does pay attention to the images as well, he is more concerned with the familiar Patmorean concepts which the poems embody.
20 Coventry Patmore, *Principle in Art, Religio Poetae and Other Essays*, p. 336.
21 J.M. Cohen, "Prophet Without Responsibility: A Study in Coventry Patmore's Poetry," *Essays in Criticism*, 1 (1951), p. 293.
22 Edmund Gosse, *Coventry Patmore* (London: Hodder and Strough-ton, 1904), p. 238.
23 *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (London: O.U.P., 1973), pp. 151-52.
24 Paul Van K.Thomson, *Francis Thompson*, p. 118.
25 Quoted in Paul Van K.Thomson, p. 142.
26 *The Real Robert Louis Stevenson and Other Critical Essays by Francis Thompson*, ed. T.L. Connolly (New York: University Publishers, 1959), pp. 315-16.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 347.
28 See *Romantic Image*, p. 149.
29 Quoted in Everard Meynell, *The Life of Francis Thompson* (1913; London: Burns & Oates Ltd., 1916), p. 298.
30 R.L. Megroz, *Francis Thompson: The Poet of Earth in Heaven* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927), p. 192.
31 *Poem of Francis Thompson*, ed. T.L. Connolly, p. 373.

32 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. W.R. Trask (New York: Hartcourt, Brace & World, 1956), p. 157.
33 E.B. Greenwood, "Poetry and Paradise: A Study in Thematics," *Essays in Criticism*, 17 (1967), p. 12.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
35 Paul Van K. Thomson, p. 160.
36 J.C. Reid, *Francis Thompson: Man and Poet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 22.
37 See Ella Freeman Sharpe, "Francis Thompson: A Psychological Study," *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 5 (1925), 329-44.

4

The Mystic Way

In this chapter and the following, we shall undertake a closer and more detailed examination of the major themes with which Patmore and Thompson were concerned as mystical poets. We shall be mainly concerned with the quality and character of the mysticism which they exemplify as *poets* individually and also with the stages of their progress on 'The mystic way.' In this context it would be useful to distinguish first between the two important types of mysticism—transcendental and immanent. Transcendence involves the concept of a Deity beyond the reach of human understanding, of a Pure Being unchangeable, not involved in the dynamic process of Becoming. The mystic aspiring to the transcendental state is painfully aware of the great 'distance' that separates him from his goal; he has to divest his mind of all the images of the phenomenal world before he can hope to attain the Great Beyond, the Real behind the appearances. Immanence, on the other hand, looks upon the Divine as the living principle penetrating the natural world, and as the indwelling Spirit discoverable in the very soul of man. The distinction between the two attitudes is, however, by no means absolute; the language of some of the mystics confirms their complementary character.[1] Transcendence and immanence, in fact, are not exclusive of each other; they acquire significance in their synthesis when the Deity is seen as Love, distant but approachable, and also as the Inner Being hidden in the depths of the soul. Personal communion is

then the ultimate and inevitable goal of the mystic drawn to the Divine by love rather than by an intellectual urge. Whatever goal a mystic sets for himself—the attainment of the Transcendent, the realization of the One in the Many, or the state of divinity attainable through an inward transmutation of the human personality, he has to 'work' towards it patiently and steadily, the path being beset with difficulties and trials.

Though mystics may vary in their modes of apprehending Reality, and correspondingly in the images they use to signify the goals they pursue, all of them essentially go through an experience which is of a psychological and spiritual character. The phases of this experience—the slow shifts and transitions—are suggested by the very accent and tone of the mystic's language and the evidence is further available from the images mystic poets employ as appropriate to these phases. Christian mysticism describes the three distinguishable phases of the mystic's spiritual advancement as the Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive stages of the Mystic Way. Evelyn Underhill, departing from this practice, introduces a fivefold distinction : "The awakening of the Self to consciousness of Divine Reality"; "Purgation : a state of pain and effort"; "Illumination : a state which includes in itself many of the stages of contemplation, 'degrees of orison,' visions and adventures of the soul described by St. Teresa and other mystical writers"; "Purification of the Spirit or Dark Night of the soul"; "Union : the true goal of the mystic quest."[2] Such diagrammatic representations are based on the assumption that the mystic's progress to the final goal conforms to a universal pattern. However, the individual experiences of every mystic need not strictly conform to the exact sequence of these phases; all the phases need also not be represented in the life of every mystic.[3] Purgation presupposes a certain degree of initial spiritual awakening and involves a conscious effort on the part of the mystic to purify his powers of perception; it consists in "a gradual detachment from the things of sense, and a desire for the things of the spirit."[4] In the phase of Illumination, the aspiring mystic feels a sense of participation in divine life; he has an immediate awareness of the divine presence and feels no longer alienated from God. The third and the last phase marks

the end of the mystical adventure—the union of the individual soul with the Divine. Christian mystics, while talking of this union, stress that it should not be mistaken for complete identification with the Divine. Union, according to them, has to be construed as the soul's experience of the *constant* presence of God.

Strictly speaking, it is difficult to find an infallible evidence of the Unitive stage in the language of mysticism even when it takes the form of peotic communication. When mystics are at one with the Divine, they tend to be least communicative, for the experience of the final Beatitude is ineffable. Poetic language may, however, barely hint at what is incommunicable, belonging to the order of experience which actually transcends all the known forms of linguistic communication.

Of one phase of the mystical experience, however, which is described as 'the dark night of the soul,' we find plentiful evidence in Christian mystical literature. This phase is supposed to follow the stage of Illumination and precede the Unitive experience. In this phase, the mystic finds himself 'alienated' from God. Deprived of the "visionary gleam," he has to suffer the ordeal of separation from the Beloved; he goes through an experience of extreme spiritual anguish. The vision over which he had exulted during the phase of Illumination is apparently withdrawn from him to his notification and despair. Actually, however, he is engaged in the last battle that must ensure his triumph over mortality. He has to know the pains of a 'mysical death' only to be blessed with the Unitive experience, which marks the final fruition of his spiritual effort.

Much of Patmore's poetry, including *The Angel*, is narrative in form. In some of the odes, included largely in BK I of *The Unknown Eros*, he speaks in the first person, the poems being concerned with his own experience of pain and sorrow. They are among the most valuable of his poems in point of their mystical quality and human appeal. Other poems, dealing with mystical themes, do not usually project him as the person *directly* involved in the experiences. It is not, however, altogether difficult to catch his personal accents. Much of the available criticism on the poet traces a biographical element in *The Angel* (cast into a novelistic form as mentioned earlier),

relating the poem to his own experience of marital love. Despite this and the generally lyrical tone of his verse, it can be maintained that Patmore's poetic mode *tends* to be impersonal. In this respect, he provides almost a contrast to Thompson, whose poetry is largely concerned with himself as the subject. While we can sense the quality of Patmore's vision and do find ample evidence of a mystical perception in his verse, his poems provide no direct or authentic clue to his own level of mystical attainment. The intellectual quality of the verse, which is quite striking in the Preludes of *The Angel* and in *The Unknown Eros* ordes, is paralleled by his fine perception as a mystical thinker revealed clearly in his prose essays, published together as *Principle in Art*, *Religio Poetae and Other Essays*, and in the collection of his aphorisms entitled *The Rod, The Root and the Flower*.

In both the prose works mentioned above, written and published later than the poetry, we find a synthesis of Patmore's original insights and what he had assimilated from diverse sources. It is here that we find elucidative comments upon, and additional clues to, the kind of mysticism his poems deal with. By no means, however, should we look upon Patmore as a *systematic* mystical philosopher. It would be more appropriate to call him a poetic "seer." To begin with, let us see what he has to say about mysticism itself. In a passage devoted to the praise of the Spanish mind and "the burning psychological insight" that the works of St. John of the Cross provide, Patmore states that "the study of true pyschology, vulgarly called 'mysticism' and 'transcendentalism' (what good is not 'mystic' and 'transcendental' to the modern 'scientist' and his pupils?), shows signs of revival in Europe generally."[5] Why he avoids, and is wary about, the term 'mysticism' is understandable; it was a term much abused and misunderstood in the nineteenth century. By "true psychology" Patmore means a kind of experimental knowledge which the soul attains through the practice of what the medieval mystics preferred to call "contemplation." Elsewhere, he states :

> What the world, which truly knows *nothing*, calls 'mysticism', is the science of *ultimates*, 'in which,' as Goethe says

> 'God is manifest'; the science of self-evident Reality, which cannot be 'reasoned about,' because it is the object of pure reason or perception. The Baby sucking its mother's breast, and the Lover returning, after twenty years' separation, to his home and food in the same bosom, are the types and princes of Mystics.[6]

Patmore throughout insisted on direct experience as the mark of true mysticism, which is "as incommunicable to those who have not experienced it as is the odour of a violet to those who have never smelt one."[7] Here is another statement illuminating the essential quality of the experience known to practical mystics :

> The 'touch' of God is not a figure of speech. 'Touch,' says Aquinas, 'applies to spiritual as well as to material things.' The same authority says, 'Touch is the sense of alimentation, taste that of savour.' A perfect life ends, as it begins, in the simplicity of infancy : it knows nothing of God on whom it feels otherwise than by touch and taste. The fullness of intelligence is the obliteration of intelligence. God is then our honey, and we, as St. Augustine says, are His; and who wants to understand honey or requires the *rationale* of a kiss? 'The Beatific Vision', says St. Bernard, 'is not seen by the eyes, but is substance which is sucked as through a nipple.'[8]

Critics have dwelt on Patmore's sacramental view of Nature and two of them particularly, Frederick Page and J.C. Reid, have linked him in this regard with Wordsworth. What is, however, significant is that the Wordsworthian feeling in him enters into and often fuses with his vision of Christian love as, for example, in his Nature poems discussed in the preceding chapter. Patmore reminds us again of Wordsworth in having shared the experience of mystics as a child. He could recall that "Angels spoke from time to time and he frequently saw the things of earth lighted up with light that was not of this earth."[9]

Patmore's distinction as a poet lies in the bold manner in

which he blends human and divine love and shows their essential unity. In fact he concentrates all his attention on highlighting this unity as the highest mystical goal. What, however, renders his position vulnerable to the attacks of his detractors is that he exalts the love between the male and the female, sanctified by the bonds of marriage, to the level of divine love itself. Probably the 'Song of Songs' and the utterances of Christian mystics like St. Paul and St. Bernard, extending the marriage analogy to the union of the soul with God, were intended to convey just a hint of the "mystic rapture" indescribable in ordinary language. The idea does not seem to have been to glorify the love between man and woman as much as to hint at the supreme significance of divine love. Patmore is certainly not the first poet to have sung of God in the language of eroticism. The Spanish mystics, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa, and, in England, Lady Julian of Norwich and Crashaw, have unhesitatingly used the language of earthly love, overtly sensuous, in relation to the Divine. But, generally speaking, the English temper does not relish the naked language of sex and would certainly not approve of its use in poetry dealing with the sacred.

Patmore's seemingly "fleshly mysticism" was, therefore, unpalatable not only to the Puritans but even to some of his Catholic admirers, Aubrey de Vere and Newman among them. Hopkins too, who otherwise held the poet in great esteem, did not feel happy about his "preoccupation with Female Vanity." It is on account of his insistent use of the image of wedded love (examples given in the preceding chapter) and his frequent references to the husband's passion for the wife (as our analysis of *The Angel* will reveal) that Patmore has been described by his detractors as an "uxorious mystic." While he has been praised by many as a singer of wedded love, he has been censured by others for his "mariolatory." This kind of a response to his erotic verse is not merely to be attributed to the typical Puritan prejudice against the language of sex. It more especially results from the reader's lack of appreciation of the symbolic meaning the images of love are meant to convey. Thus the 'Psyche' poems may not appeal to a reader who fails to understand the Pagan myth in the light of the significance of the

'Song of Songs.'

Patmore's insights as a psychologist of love, human and divine, and his ideas about the spiritual meaning of marriage, were stimulated and sharpened, primarily, by the writings of Swedenborg, and influenced further by the sacred works of Christian saints, notably St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard, St. Augustine, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa. This is borne out by the frequent allusions to these writers (and by the evidence of their ideas) in *The Rod, The Root and The Flower.* Swedenborg and Coleridge have been mentioned earlier as having influenced Patmore's thinking on the nature of symbolism. Both were equally influential in confirming his belief in the sacramental significance of marriage. It is very likely, as J.C. Reid maintains, that Coleridge "first awakened his [Patmore's] interest in Swedenborg."[10] The following tribute paid to the man could be taken as a clue in this regard :

> We have had only one psychologist and human psychologist —at least, only one who has published his knowledge—for at least a thousand years, namely Swedenborg ('the man of ten centuries', says Coleridge).[11]

Patmore found lyrical inspiration in marriage. In his pursuing of his major poetic theme—that of married love—in *The Angel*, Swedenborg seems to have provided the intellectual stimuls. And in the words of Caroline Spurgeon he is "the English writer most saturated with Swedenborg's thought."[12] Even after his conversion to Rome, Patmore continued to admire Swedenborg's genius and was largely in agreement with his ideas. However, he does not seem to have approved of his "lacking the discipline of authority and dogma."[13] Swedenborgian concepts and images occur in Patmore's poems written both before and after he severed his connections with the Anglican Church. The poet was constantly occupied with one aspect of the principle of unity operating in human life and the universe—that of the conjunction of the male and the female, which is the central doctrine in the Swedenborgian system.

Sex plays a vital role in life inasmuch as it is at its very root; the phenomenon of sexual duality has, therefore, specially

engaged the attention of thinkers and philosophers the world over. Some mystical thinkers have sought to interpret the mystery of life in terms of the natural urge of the two sexes towards unity in conjunction. Thus Swedenborg looks upon the *true* marriage of man and woman as of immense spiritual significance. In his view, such marriages, realized on earth, are perpetual in heaven, thriving under the presence of God. Patmore, however, departs from Swedenborg in restricting the spiritual meaning of marriage to the union of the individual soul with God. He conceives of spiritual marriage as an act of conjunction between *unequals*, between God as the condescending male and the soul as the favoured female :

> In the infinite distance between God and man, theologians find the secret of the infinite felicity of divine love; and the incomparable happiness of love between the sexes is similarly founded on their inequality.
>
> There is a mystic craving in the great to become the love-captive of the small while the small has a corresponding thirst for the enslavement of the great.[14]

He uses an analogy from science to elucidate the nature of the mutual love between God and the soul :

> God is the great, *positive* Magnet for the Universe, and whatever, in the Universe, aspires to approach Him must assume the *negative*, the feminine, or passive and receptive aspect. He repels and rejects His own primary aspect. He says to His own: 'Thy Maker is thy Husband.'[15]

Consistent with the Catholic point of view, the Trinity and the Incarnation are interpreted by Patmore in the light of the nuptial philosophy of Swedenborg and the ideas of Coleridge as influenced by Boehme and Hegel.[16]

The influence of the Christian Fathers, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard and St. Augustine, is also evident in Patmore's spiritual thinking on love and marriage. The poet's familiarity with their concepts is reflected in his prose and poetry alike. It was St. Thomas who first interpreted the 'Song of Songs' as

signifying the Church as the Bride of Christ. St. Bernard went a step further and extended the analogy to the relation between the soul and God. Patmore accepts both the positions. In his exposition of the doctrines of Christian theology, St. Thomas (using Aristotelian ideas and logic) dwells, among other things, on the unity of the body and the soul and stresses the need of keeping the impulses of love under the control of reason. Following him, Patmore rejects the body-soul dichotomy and sees the significance of the Incarnation in the Word becoming Flesh. He distinguishes love from passion, holding that the former, being governed by law, has "form," while the latter is "formless" in that it does not obey law. Like the Metaphysicals, chiefly Donne, he gives supreme importance to love, and with them follows the medieval Christians in upholding the union of sense and spirit. Thus he maintains that "what love does in transfiguring life that religion does in transfiguring love."[17] The Christian humanist in him views the body as the "Temple of God" and that, in a nutshell, explains his belief in the sacramental value of love and of the natural world which we experience through our senses. Patmore sees significance in St. Augustine's saying that "Jesus Christ is the Bride as well as the Bridegroom; for He is the Body."[18] This saying perhaps provides the basis for the profound statement he makes (anticipating the recent speculations of sex psychology) :

> The external man and woman are each the projected *simulacrum* of the latent half of the other, and they do but love themselves in thus loving their opposed likeness.[19]

As for St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa, their influence is more directly reflected in Patmore's language of love, as his use of the erotic and 'dark night' images in the 'Psyche' poems has shown. Both the saints have given vivid accounts of their rapturous love for Christ visualized as the Bridegroom, in a hightened language using highly erotic imagery. Patmore's mysticism, as we shall see, is expressed in similar terms.

As a poet concerned with the interpretation of divine love in terms of human love sanctified by marriage, Patmore devotes considerable attention to woman. All the resources of

language are exploited in glorifying womanhood, in praising woman as man's spouse. The poetic adoration of woman is not seemingly matched by the view Patmore takes of woman's status in his prose essays. She is described as "The Weaker Vessel" having a claim on man's honour by virtue of that "sweet unreasonableness which humbles the gods to the dust and compels them to adore the lace below the last hem of her brocade."[20] The full significance of the inequality stressed between the male and the female can only be understood in the light of the poet's preoccupation with the concepts and dogmas of his Catholic faith. The following tribute he pays to woman is significant :

> Woman is the sum and complex of all nature and is the *visible* glory of God. The divine manhood, indeed may be *discerned* in man through the cloud of that womanhood of which he is a participator, inasmuch as he also is the Body, which, as St. Augustine says, 'is the Bride.' The 'Word made Flesh' is the word made Woman, and therefore, as that Word constantly affirms, we can know or discern the First Person only through the Second; and, in the relations of Man and Woman and of Christ, and the soul, it is the common womanhood that is the ground and means of communion of the higher with the lower. At the same time, the actual woman is also 'Homo,' and has a subordinate participation in the masculine factor (as he has of the feminine), and it is by this only that she can have communion with him; and if each were not both, neither could have any comprehension of the other, that reciprocal desire the consciousness of which is the felicity and bond of love. As it is between Man and Woman, so is it between Christ and Man, who is His 'Glory,' and between God and Christ, who is God's Glory.'[21]

This passage enables us to see how Patmore looks upon either sex as sharing the characteristics of the other, a point noted earlier too. He shows how man and woman, through the blessing of the Incarnation, participate in divine glory. He sees the highest manifestation of divinity in woman though he

considers her vocation to be that of pleasing man.[22] Woman in his eyes is thus adorable by man who too is entitled to her devotion at the same time. What Patmore says in praise of the Virgin specifically is applicable to woman as she essentially is:

> We must not be afraid to believe that this Bride and Mother, with whom we are identified, is 'Regina Coeli,' as well as 'Regina Mundi'; and that this Queen of Heaven and Earth is simply a pure, natural woman.[23]

Patmore, following Swedenborg, does not consider celibacy essential to spirituality. As a Christian humanist, he does not believe in the mortification of the flesh and the renunciation of physical pleasures. He insists on the sacredness of the body and stresses the inward purity of the soul, viewing 'virginity' in the same light. He sees no incongruity between virginity and the married state:

> Every true Lover has perceived, at least in a few moments of his life, that the fullest fruition of love is without the loss of virginity. Lover and Mistress become sensibly one flesh in the instant that they confess to one another a full and mutual complacency of intellect, will, affection, and sense, with the promise of inviolable faith. *That* is the moment of fruition, and all that follows is, as St. Thomas Aquinas says 'an accidental perfection of marriage.'[24]

Virginity is taken by Patmore to mean that spiritual condition of the individual soul which ensures its union with the Lord. The poet seems to attach little significance to its implications on the physical plane.

Critics, both hostile and friendly, have attempted to establish a relation between Patmore's deep involvement with the theme of wedded love and his own experience of matrimony. The hostile critic blames the poet for being excessively preoccupied, even to the point of obsession, with the trivial domesticities of the married state. In its extreme form the hostile criticism against Patmore takes objection to what it sees as his "nasty mixture of piety and concupiscence."[25]

What the sympathetic critics of the poet accept as mysticism of the erotic type repels those who, like C.C. Abbott, believe that "mystics never want the best of both worlds."[26] Edmund Gosse, Frederick Page and J.C. Reid, who are among Patmore's sensible and friendly critics, tend to look for the sources of his poetic inspiration in his personal and private life, attempting to establish that his insights into love derived their strength and confirmation from his actual experience of marrige. But this kind of argument is not totally valid inasmuch as the genesis of all types and forms of creative writing cannot be explained merely in these terms. As regards mystical poetry of any intensity, it may be valid to take into account the involvement of the poet in the experiences he communicates. In order to explore the deeper sources of the poetry of mystical experience, we must turn our attention to the inner spiritual life of the poet rather than the external events of his life. Perhaps nothing better provides significant clues to the inner life of the mystical poet than his actual utterance. To know about Patmore the mystical poet, we should turn to his poems.

The Angel in the House

We referred to the critical opinion which seeks to establish that Patmore's odes are a departure, in matter and style, from *The Angel in the House* and its sequel, *The Victories of Love.* We maintained the view that there is an essential continuity in the poet's work and demonstrated this with the help of the familiar Patmorean images of nuptial love. The odes, however, are an advance over the earlier poetry; Patmore's vision, as revealed in them, has gained in depth and quality. *The Angel* and *The Victories* written before the poet's conversion, show unmistakably that he has an awareness of the spiritual basis of love; but he is still a man of the world feeling his way to the 'Country of the soul.' At the periphery of the Mystic Way, rather than poised on it, he sings of the joys of the earthly paradise he has discovered in matrimonial love. As an initiate of the divine mystery of love, he is yet to pass through the 'fires' of purgation to see the truths clearly as an illuminated mystic. The Angel does, however,

provide definite glimpses and anticipations of the profound vision of the odes. Thompson informs us that Patmore himself claimed that "the mysticism which flames visibly in *The Unknown Eros Odes* was already implicit in The Angel."[27] Patmore seems to be concerned here with the preliminaries of the mystical quest; he is fascinated by the graces of the 'human form divine' exemplified by woman contemplated as an object of love by man. His sacramental vision of love reflects a unified response to the beauty which Nature and Woman embody. The mystical awareness in *The Angel* is incipient, and is immanent rather than transcendental in character.

Patmore's first poems, comprising the volume published in 1844, bore the usual marks of a beginner's work, showing the poet imitating his predecessors and, at the same time, labouring to find his own style. *The Angel* left no one in doubt that here was a poet who had a theme of his *own* to express, and a manner and mode of doing it in perfect accord with the prevailing Victorian taste. Tennyson welcomed the poem as one assured of "a fair chance of immortality" though he was not happy about some of the lines which he described as "hammered out of old nails."[28] Emerson, Newman, Ruskin and Carlyle also spoke favourably of the poem. Edmund Gosse, Rossetti and Swinburne were among those who made fun of the poem for its domestic theme. Patmore had originally planned to write the 'Matrimonial Epic' in six parts. He did not complete the design and stopped when he had only finished the four parts. The first two parts, published under the titles *Betrothal* (1854) and *Espousal* (1856), comprise *The Angel*, and the remaining two parts, which appeared under the separate titles *Faithful for Ever* (1860) and *The Victories of Love* (1863), were finally published as a single poem entitled *The Victories of Love*. The contemplated last two sections were intended to treat, in Patmore's words, of "the hope which remains for individual love in death."

Patmore was much excited over the theme he had chosen for *The Angel*. He believed that he had been divinely commissioned to be its singer and felt as if he had stumbled upon a rare fortune. Aubrey de Vere throws light on the theme

of the poem in terms of what Patmore himself had explained to him.

> There was, he [Patmore] assured me, one particular theme for poetry, the more serious importance of which had been singularly missed by most poets of all countries, frequently as they had taken its name in vain. That theme was Love as, at best, a mere Imaginative Passion—but Love in the deeper and softer sense of the word. The Syren woman had been often sung . . . . But that Love in which, as he affirmed, all the Loves centre, and that Woman who is the rightful sustainer of them all, the Inspiration of Youth, and the consolation of Age, that Love and that Woman, he asserted had seldom been sung sincerely effectively. He had himself long since selected that as the chief one of his poetry, but, often as he had made the attempt, it had never succeeded to his judgement . . . . He had made one attempt more and this time a successful one.[29]

Further light is thrown on the sacramental character of wedded love by what Patmore said much later in one of his essays :

> This character is instantly recognized by the uninitiated heart and apprehension of every youth and maiden; but it is very easily forgotten and profaned by most, unless its sanctity is upheld by priests and poets. Poets are naturally its prophets—all the more powerful because, like the prophets of old, they are wholly independent of the priests, and are often the first to discover and rebuke the lifelessness into which that order is always tending to fall.[30]

The word 'Angel' in the title of the poem has generally been taken to mean 'woman.' Many readers would identify the 'Angel' with the poet's first wife, Emily, believing that the poem is autobiographical. This impression has gained ground in spite of the impersonal mode of narration used in the poem. Reading the poem as a work reproducing the *details* of the poet's own experience of love and marriage does not seem to

be correct. That the biographical approach is sometimes helpful may not be disputed, but it is certainly not always reliable. J.C. Reid, in his study of the poet. makes generally intelligent use of the biographical evidence he draws upon, supporting it with psychological reasoning at several places. He thus tries to relate *The Angel* to Patmore's happy memories of his own wooing of Emily. Oliver Elton, however, takes a sounder position in asserting that the poet's "feeling, though not the story, is his own."[31] Beyond this, circumstantial details from Patmore's life need not be dragged into an examination of the poem. That Emily inspired the composition of the poem is a view which has been generally insisted upon by critics. It is based on the inference they have drawn from what Patmore had written to her sometime earlier :

> I have been meditating a long poem for you; but I am determined not to give you anything I write unless it is the best thing I have written. O, how much the best it ought to be, if it would be justice to its subject.[32]

A thoughtful reading of *The Angel*, however, convinces us that the poem is concerned with love as it grows between man and woman and unites them in wedlock. In view of this, one could argue that the word 'Angel' cannot merely refer to 'woman.' At the same time, it needs to be mentioned that Honoria, glorified as illustrating ideal womanhood, provides the chief focus of attention in the poem. To that extent readers would be justified in associating the 'Angel' of the poem with a woman.

The Angel was a poem of significance for Patmore in that he chose here a contemporary theme, and accordingly provided a realistic setting for it. Earlier he had dealt with medieval themes in such poems as '*The Falcon*', written under the influence of the Romantics, particularly Coleridge and Keats. The influence of Tennyson, who patronized him initially, can be seen in *The Angel* in its quality of realistic portrayal. But more significant and pervasive is the influence of Wordsworth, who seems to have inspired Patmore's sacramental feeling for Nature and his preference for the simple domesticities of life.

However, in also turning to the Metaphysicals, specially Donne, Patmore went beyond his contemporaries, with the exception chiefly of Thompson and Hopkins. What even Thompson and Hopkins did not share with Donne was Patmore's lyrical preoccupation with the psychology of man and woman in love, his acute intellectual analysis of the moods of lovers and of the phases of their courtship. Patmore shows his artistic resourcefulness, as stated earlier, in introducing into each canto of the poem short lyrics, the Preludes, which always precede the Idylls, the sections which incorporate the story. It is the Preludes in *The Angel* which link him with the Metaphysicals. They embody the poet's contemplations of the concrete events narrated in the ensuing Idylls. It is again in The Preludes that we trace the rudiments of the mystical insights *The Unknown Eros* odes present more clearly. Keen reflection and narration go hand in hand in each Canto, and this artistic device accounts for the attraction *The Angal* holds for the reader. 'Love a Virtue' is cited as an example from among the Preludes which precede the Idylls included under the title 'Honoria':

> Strong passions mean weak will, and he
> Who truly knows the strength and bliss
> Which are in love, will own with me
> No passion but a virtue 'tis.
> Few hear my word; it soars above
> The subtlest senses of the swarm
> Of wretched things which know not love,
> Their Psyche still a wingless worm.
> Ice-cold seems heaven's noble glow
> To spirits whose vital heat is hell;
> And to corrupt hearts even so
> The songs I sing, the tale I tell.
> These cannot see the robes of white
> In which I sing of love. Alack,
> But darkness shows in heavenly light,
> Though whiteness, in the dark, is black ! (pp. 78-79.)

The Prelude is taken up with lyrical reflections on the nature of love, its inherent virtue and nobility. The argument presented

in the lyric is clinched in the concluding quatrain, the last two lines 'But darkness shows in heavenly light,/Though whiteness, in the dark, is black!' recalling the witty lines of the Metaphysical poets. The reflections are appropriate to the actual experience narrated in the corresponding Idylls. This is the introductory Idyll, recording an experience of love :

Grown weary with a week's exile
From those fair friends, I rode to see
The church-restorings; lounged awhile,
And met the Dean; was ask'd to tea,
And found their cousin, Frederick Graham,
At Honor's side. Was I concern'd,
If, when she sang, his colour came,
That mine, as with a buffet, burn'd?
A man to please a girl ! thought I,
Retorting his forced smiles, the shrouds,
Of wrath, so hid as she was by,
Sweet moon between her lighted clouds! (pp. 79-80.)

We may now look a little closely at the text of *The Angel* to determine the essential qualities of the vision of love it communicates. Here is what we are told in the Prologue about the general theme of the poem :

'Learn that to me, though born late,
'There does, beyond doubt, befall
'(May my great fortune make me great!)
'The first of themes, sung last of all.
'In green and undiscover'd ground,
'Yet near where many others sing,
'I have the very well-head found
'Whence gushes the Pierian Spring.'
Then she : 'what is it, Dear? The life
Of Arthur, or Jerusalem's Fall?'
'Neither : your gentle self, my Wife,
And love, that grows from one to all. (p. 62.)

These words are spoken by the poet-narrator, Felix Vaughan,

to his wife, Honoria, on their eighth wedding day. The theme is that of love, marital and premarital, as experienced by the couple. The poet-narrator seeks to explore the higher philosophical and religious significance of wedded love in the light of his own experience. The woman espoused provides the needed clues to the transcendental implications of this love :

'Your praises give a hundred clues
'To mythological intent!
'And, severing thus the truth from trope,
'In you the Commentators see
'Outlines occult of abstract scope,
'A future for philosophy! (p. 63.)

Patmore's distinction as a singer of love lies in showing how "normal love poetry can be as wonderful as abnormal."[33] This is what he achieves splendidly in *The Angel*. The poem celebrates sacred love, combining both passion and purity. Violent and gross passions are as alien to this love as pure Platonic passions that are "airy" and, therefore, incapable of being realized. Alice Meynell said of Patmore while characterizing his attitude towards love that he is between "Anacreon and Plato." Here is the poet's confirmation of her statement :

I saw three Cupids (so I dream'd),
Who made three kites, on which were drawn,
In letters that like roses gleam'd.
'Plato', 'Anacreon', and 'Vaughan.'
The boy who held by Plato tried
His airy venture first; all sail,
It heav'nward rushed till scarce descried,
Then pitch'd and dropp'd, for want of tail.
Anacreon's Love, with shouts of mirth
That pride of spirit thus should fall,
To his kite link'd a lump of earth,
And, lo, it would not soar at all.
Last, my disciple freighted his
With a long streamer made of flowers,

The children of the sod, and this
Rose in the sun, and flew for hours. (p. 142.)

For Patmore love is not "but one of many passions" as it was for Johnson; for him it is the only passion that "comprehends a good many of the others, including religious passion itself."[34] The language of *The Angel* as a whole reveals this abundantly. The poet sings of nuptial love with "the purity of a saint and the passion of a flaming lover."[35] As we have mentioned earlier, in this respect Patmore is as true to medieval Christianity as to the practice of the Divine poets of the seventeenth century. Love, in his view, has a right growth, above all, in a state of subjection to law; and marriage, accordingly, flourishes under religious restraints :

They live by law, not like the fool,
But like the bard, who freely sings
In strictest bonds of rhyme and rule,
And finds in them, not bonds, but wings. (p. 119.)

An important aspect of Patmore's conception of love relates to his idea of sexual duality. In fact, the poet sees a divine manifestation in the harmony of opposites—the conjunction of the male and the female. This belief rests also on the Biblical sayings : "let us make man in our own image" and "male and female created He them." This is echoed in these lines :

Female and male God made the man:
His image is the whole, not half;
And in our love we dimly scan
The love which is between Himself. (p. 107.)

Elsewhere in the poem, Patmore stresses the underlying unity of sexual contrasts (from which follows the significance of conjugal love) in lines reminiscent of the witty language of the Caroline poets :

Nature, with endless being rife,
Parts each things into 'him' and 'her',

> And, in the arithmetic of life,
> The smallest unit is a pair;
> And thus, oh, strange, sweet half of me,
> If I confess a loftier flame,
> If more I love high Heaven than thee,
> I more than love thee, thee I am; (p. 196.)

Nuptial love has thus an inherently divine character—it proceeds from and leads upto God. In its spiritual significance, it even goes beyond virginity itself :

> Virgins are they before the Lord,
> Whose hearts are pure : the vestal fire
> Is not, as some misread the word,
> By marriage quench'd but burns the higher.

Consistent with the Christian belief that marriages are made in heaven, Patmore sees the mysterious hand of divinity behind connubial relations :

> He meets, by heavenly chance express,
> The destined maid; some hidden hand
> Unveils to him that loveliness
> Which others cannot understand. (p. 77.)

This view is opposed to "Romantic conception of 'soul mates' and 'elective affinities."[36] Lovers, male and female, respond naturally to the divine impulse in being attracted to each other rather than act *deliberately* on practical considerations of individual preference or of mutual adjustment. Even the incompatibility of temperaments between the partners should not come in the way of the consummation of wedded love. Far more desirable, therefore, than the need of mere mutual adjustment is the need for the partners to be true to their marriage vows and be alive to the sacramental nature of their relation. Patmore is rather of the view that the lovers who are divinely guided towards nuptial union have a happier lot than those who depend on their own judgements in making choices :

They safely walk in darkest ways
Whose youth is lighted from above,
Where, through the senses' silvery haze,
Dawns the veil'd moon of nuptial love.
Who is the happy husband? He
Who, scanning his unwedded life,
Thanks Heaven, with a conscience free,
'Twas faithful to his future wife. (p. 91.)

There is a view of domestic love advocated by those who look upon its 'constancy' as a kind of monotony; they do not approve of this love and look for variety outside the confines of marriage. Patmore rejects such 'romantic' notions of love and stresses his faith in the constancy of married love :

I vow'd unvarying faith, and she,
To whom in full I pay that vow,
Rewards me with variety
Which men who change can never know. (p. 197.)

Patmore's religious attitude to domestic love enables him to see an uncommon grace in it, the grace which is usually lost to the view of those who are enthralled by unbridled, "romantic" love. Love, he stresses, has to be practised by the married partners not only as a spiritual discipline but also as an art. The soul is not to be cultivated at the expense of the senses. This requires that the lovers do not take each other for granted. They should pay due attention to love as a "nursling of civility" and preserve its vigour and vitality. They have to be on their guard against drabness, which is likely to result from routine and familiarity. Thus, when pursued as an art and treated with due respect and ceremony, household love is glorified and its religious and aesthetic character vindicated :

'Tis found, and needs it must so be,
That life from love's allegiance flags,
When love forgets his majesty
In sloth's unceremonious rags.
Let love make home a gracious Court;

> There let the World's rude, hasty ways
> Be fashion'd to a loftier port,
> And learn to bow and stand at gaze;
> And let the sweet respective sphere
> Of personal worship there obtain
> Circumference for moving clear,
> None treading on another's train.
> This makes that pleasures do not cloy,
> And dignifies our mortal strife
> With calmness and considerate joy
> Befitting our immortal life. (p. 154.)

Patmore's point of view regarding womanhood, as it is presented in his poetry, is tender and not condescending as his prose essays seem to suggest. Essentially a male point of view, it reveals itself in the constant glorification of woman in *The Angel.* She provides the chief focus of attention here, being associated with all that is spiritual about love. She is presented as the living image of heaven on earth. Arthur Symons under-rates the significance of her portrayal in *The Angel*; he describes Patmore's conception of woman herein as that of "woman as the lady." He states further :

> Woman, as she is seen in *The Angel in the House*, is a delightful, adorable, estimable, pretty, capricious child; demonstrably finite, capturable, a butterfly not yet Psyche.... She who was a bright and cherished toy in *The Angel in the House* becomes in *The Unknown Eros* pure spirit, the passionate sister of the pure idea. She is the mystical rose of beauty the female half of that harmony of opposites which is God. She has other names and is the Soul, the Church, the Madonna.[37]

Symons overlooks an important fact. Woman as wife glorified, pictured in the person of Honoria, represents a noble conception, that of divine Humanity, though she does not fit into any *explicit* scheme of symbolism in the poem. She is the 'Angel' spreading divine radiance around her and reminding man of God. As an earthly creature, she is of course 'the

lady,' but to the spiritual eye her divinity is perceptible. Woman, as portrayed in the religious odes (BK II of *The Unknown Eros*), assumes a definite symbolic character and significance. This is also suggested in Symons' statement. What he does not emphasize is that while woman is the focus of worship in *The Angel*, she is largely the seeker and worshipper in the religious odes: conceived as the soul devoted to God. No doubt, as Psyche, she is also pursued by God. When idealized specifically as the blessed Virgin, she becomes adorable both as the Mother and Bride. In *The Angel* woman is essentially shown as the object of worship and her divinity stressed. This aspect is overlooked by Symons. The depiction of woman in *The Angel* and the religious odes, respectively, does not, however, reflect any shift in Patmore's basic attitude: his rejection of the body-soul dichotomy. On the whole, he builds the principle of sexual duality into an elaborate symbolism which shows woman in two different roles—the seeker and the sought.

Many passages in *The Angel* dwell on the essential greatness of woman. She is described as fulfilling a divine mission in demonstrating her infinite capacity for love and self-sacrifice. She both embodies the god-head and leads man heavenward.

> He eloquently thus: 'Her face
> 'Is the summ'd sweetness of the earth,
> 'Her soul the glass of heaven's grace,
> 'To which she leads me by the hand;
> 'Or, briefly all the truth to say
> 'To you, who briefly understand,
> 'She is both heaven and the way. (pp. 188-89.)

Woman's distinction from man is important; this is upheld on the authority of the Bible :

> Lo, when the Lord made North and South
> And sun and moon ordained, He,
> Forthbringing each by word of mouth
> In order of its dignity,
> Did man from the crude clay express

By sequence, and, all else decreed,
He form'd the woman; nor might less
Than Sabbath such a work succeed.
And still with favour singled out,
Marr'd less than man by mortal fall,
Her disposition is devout,
Her countenance angelical; (p. 83.)

A further distinction is stated in Swedenborgian terms, as the distinction between Love and Truth (corresponding to the solar heat and light respectively), the woman's position being higher in the scale of values :

Were she but half of what she is,
He twice himself, mere love alone,
Her special crown, as truth is his,
Gives title to the worthier throne,
For love is substance, truth the form;
Truth without love were less than nought; (p. 90.)

Although the transcendental insights of *The Unkown Eros* seem to lie beyond the vision of love expressed in *The Angel*, an apprehension of divine immanence is in evidence in the latter poem. This is revealed in the lyrical adoration of woman, of her physical graces and spiritual qualities. This type of adoration reminds us of form-worship, being a prelude to the mystical contemplation proper with which the odes are concerned. Here is an illustration provided by Felix Vaughan's contemplation of Honoria's loveliness :

I loved her in the name of God,
  And for the ray she was of Him;
I ought to admire much more, not less;
  Her beauty was a godly grace;
The mystery of loveliness,
  Which made an altar of her face,
Was not of the fiesh, though that was fair,
  But a most pure and living light
Without a name, by which the rare
  And virtuous spirit flamed to sight. (p. 121.)

The Victories of Love

An interesting critical observation on *The Angel* is that "the theme, when discovered is splendid, the treatment is deplorable."[38] There are other views which, however, find fault with the very subject of the poem, describing the passion of the happily married partners as unfit for poetic treatment. These criticisms have been answered by Frederick Page and J.C. Reid with arguments which are almost identical. The point they make is that pathos creeps into *The Angel* with the disappointment of Frederick Graham, the cousin of Honoria, whom she had nearly accepted as her lover before Felix Vaughan, the rival who superseded him, appeared on the scene. Frederick Graham's story dominates *The Victories of Love*, the sequel to *The Angel*. While pathos just casts a thin shadow over the otherwise gay atmosphere of *The Angel*, it pervades *The Victories* almost entirely. Frederick Graham, who failed to win Honoria, accepts, out of disappointment, the hand of Jane in marriage—a woman neither socially his equal nor otherwise fit to become his wife. Significantly, "the unideal marriage in unideal circumstances"[39] of Frederick and Jane, who find "happiness through adversity," provides a foil to the "harmonious happiness of Felix and Honoria.[40] Arthur Quiller Couch maintains that "nuptial love, treated absolutely, is as poor a subject for art as, treated relatively, it is a good one."[41] Not apparently approving of the theme of absolute happiness dealt with in *The Angel*, he maintains further that in the less fortunate story of Frederick and Jane, narrated in *The Victories*, Patmore discovered "a far better subject, if he had only handled it well."[42]

All these estimates seek to judge the value of the two poems in terms of the quality of their narrative element. The enduring value of the poems, in our view, lies in the concepts and insights they present symbolically concerning the subject of love, human and divine. If we neglect this aspect, and concentrate on the narrative element, we would be overlooking the essentials. We do not mean to suggest that the story does not matter; but a sound appreciation of the poems would take into account the circumstances which understandably led the poet to use the form of a "novel in verse." The Vitorian

era was an era of domestic fiction and to satisfy the popular taste Patmore adopted the narrative form for the lyrical expression of his reflections on love and marriage. When he came to realize the direction in which he should more usefully exercise his poetic talent, he gave up all pretence to being a story-teller and thus found his proper mode and style. This is evident in *The Unknown Eros* odes. However, as a story, *The Victories* reads better than *The Angel*. Here we come across a wider range of characters and the story unfolds in the letters they write to one another. The Preludes are dispensed with, the octosyllabic metre is retained and the quatrains (which were used in the earlier poem) are replaced by the couplets.

The full significance of *The Victories* lies in its being a necessary sequel to *The Angel* and in linking the latter with *The Unknown Eros*. This view is consistent with our emphasis on the essential oneness of Patmore's poetic work. However in *The Angel*, we form a picture of Honoria only as we see her through the eyes of Felix Vaughan. On the other hand, we get acquainted with the inner conflicts and emotions of Jane through what she says herself in the letters she writes to her mother and mother-in-law, and also through the accounts given by her husband, Frederick Graham. We watch the improvement in her as she grows as a wife under the benevolent care of her husband, which she merits by virtue of her humility. Likewise, we also watch the gradual development of Frederick Graham's attitude to love, his spirit of self-sacrifice and his moral triumph—initially over his disappointment in the love of Honoria and then over his grief caused by the death of Jane. The deeper significance of the Jane-Frederick episode has been explained thus: "the relationship of Jane to Frederick was for Patmore the prototype of the soul's to God."[43] It is in this respect that *The Victories* looks forward to the odes, to that "region of 'mystic' love in which is rooted Patmore's profoundest spiritual conception."[44]

The Victories is shot through with comments and reflections of the type we find in *The Angel*, although it has no such separate lyrical pieces as the Preludes. Here is, for example,

an observation on Love :

> This Love is a Divinity,
> And holds his high election free
> Of human merit; or let's say,
> A child by ladies call'd to play,
> But careless of their becks and wiles,
> Till, seeing one who sits and smiles
> Like any else, yet only charms,
> He cries to come into her arms. (p. 215.)

Frederick Graham has to go through an inward struggle, and sacrifice his 'self-love' in order that his love for Jane endures and gains full strength. He has his moments of self-examination followed by inward illumination :

> Jane be much more dear
> Than all as she is much more near !
> I'll love her; Yea, and love's joy comes
> Ever from self-love's martyrdoms! (p. 250.)

Jane has an acute consciousness of her inferiority. Plain and simple, she is overwhelmed by her husband's loving care of her which makes her watchful of what is going on in his mind :

> I know he knows I'm plain, and small,
> Stupid, and ignorant, and all
> Awkward and mean; and, by degrees,
> I see a beauty which he sees,
> When often he looks strange awhile,
> Then recollects me with a smile. (pp. 257-58.)

Educated by the love she gets from her husband, and with the help of her religious inclinations, she comes to have a right understanding of the Christian view of nuptial love:

> From that time many a Scripture text
> Help'd me, which had, before, perplex'd.

Oh, what a wond'rous word seem'd this:
He is my head, as Christ is his!
None ever could have dared to see
In marriage such a dignity
For man, and for his wife, still less,
Such happy, happy lowliness,
Had God Himself not made it plain; (pp. 275-76.)

The 'Wedding Sermon,' which closes *The Victories of Love*, provides, in outline, all that Patmore has to say regarding the theme of wedded love. The Christian meaning of the nuptial analogy is explained thus:

No giddiest hope, no wildest guess
Of Love's most innocent loftiness
Had dared to dream of its own worth,
Till Heaven's bold sun-gleam lit the earth.
Christ's marriage with the church is more,
My children, than a metaphor.
The heaven of heavens is symbol'd where
The torch of Psyche flash'd despair.
But here I speak of heights, and heights
Are hardly scaled. The best delights
Of even this homeliest passion, are
In the most perfect souls so rare,
That they who feel them are as men
Sailing the Southern ocean, when,
At midnight, they look up, and eye
The starry Cross, and a strange sky
Of brighter stars; and sad thoughts come
To each how far he is from home. (p. 324.)

The Unknown Eros

Passing from the domestic poems, *The Angel* and its sequel, to *The Unknown Eros* gives the reader an immediate feeling of elevation—the lyrical reflections on the theme of love now yielding place to an intense contemplation markedly mystical in character. In the former poems, human love was shown to have significance in relation to the Divine; it had its best

fulfilment in nuptial union as foreshadowing the union of the soul with God. The delightful lyrics on married love in *The Angel*, and the sad element introduced into *The Victories* to reveal the serious side of this love, could not enable us to have, beyond faint glimpses, an immediate apprehension of its divine mystery. The two poems provide a hint of divine love in the insistent emphasis laid on the sacramental character of the marital relation. In *The Unknown Eros*, on the other hand, we seem to confront cosmic mysteries and, instead of listening to an earthly epithalmion, we listen to the 'music of the spheres.' We do not lose touch with the earth altogether; human interests continue to have their significance in the background as starting points for the contemplation of their spiritual meaning. Patmore is at his best here, his achievement claiming for him a place alongside the greatest poets of the nineteenth century. The achievement does not rest merely on the lofty character of the themes dealt with but on the new instruments Patmore forged for himself. Here he gave up the simple octosyllabic metre which had satisfied the demands of the matrimonial poems. He ventured upon the irregular 'Pindarics' with lines of varying length, each ode having a rhyme-pattern of its own. The poetry of the odes reveals Patmore's metrical and linguistic resourcefulness and embodies, on the whole, a profound vision.

The publication of *The Unknown Eros* was preceded by an interval of many years of silence in which Patmore, it seems, involved himself in a deep study of the works of the Christian mystics—St. Augustine, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, St. Bernard and others. Several of the odes are concerned with themes which remind us of these mystics. It is, however, difficult to establish whether Patmore had any direct experiences of the kind usually associated with practical mystics. In the case of the Christian mystics mentioned above, we can depend on the accounts they have given of their individual experiences. The intimacy of their contact with the Divine is also reflected further in the quality of their utterances. Patmore has given us no direct account of his progress on the Mystic Way. Yet several critics describe him as a mystic, comparable to the Christian saints who were his favourite

reading. The poet's sayings from *The Rod, The Root and The Flower* are quoted by important writers on mysticism including Evelyn Underhill. Caroline Spurgeon states that Patmore "was so entirely a mystic that it seems the first and the last and the only thing to say about him."[45] However, in fixing the characteristics of mysticism as it finds expression in literature, her criteria of differentiation are general and non-specific. She is too liberal in admitting into the class of mystics all those who speak from an "experienced conviction of unity"[46] of some sort. From this broad angle, she is able to see a mystical element in the works of a number of English poets belonging to the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. She categorizes Patmore as a Love-mystie concerned with the unity that underlies the relationship between God and the soul. Of Patmore's ability to make perceptive observations on mysticism, we find unmistakable evidence in *The Rod, The Root and the Flower*. In the light of this evidence, we should have no hesitation in acknowledging him as a mystical thinker of a high order. The intellectual quality of the more transcendental odes of *The Unknown Eros* (as we shall show on analysis) lends further support to this view. J.C. Reid states his point of view in this regrad :

> He [Patmore] is, in relation to Christian mysticism, a 'speculative mystic.' *The Unknown Eros* is the product of religious experience and of poetic vision stimulated by mystical reading but hardly the product of direct mystical experience of the type recorded, for example, by St. John of the Cross. Yet as a speculative mystic, Patmore shows an understanding of the 'science of love' that can only be called expert.[47]

One can certainly not establish that *The Unknown Eros* is "the product of direct mystical experience" and challenge the opinion maintained by J.C. Reid on this issue. But his view that Patmore "shows an understanding of the 'science of love' " and to that extent is just a speculative mystic seems not very accurate. Beyond mere 'understanding' or intellectual speculation, Patmore's verse, on close examination, reveals

clear marks of a mystical perception. *The Angel* and *The Victories*, as we have seen, show this perception in its incipient form. *The Unknown Eros* manifests it more intensely.

In 1866, after a prolonged silence, Patmore circulated a small volume of nine odes among his friends, which did not evoke the response he had expected. In 1876, he published a larger volume entitled *The Unknown Eros* which consisted of thirty-one odes including the nine poems of the earlier volume. Finally, a year after, forty-three odes and the poem *Amelia* were presented by the poet in a single volume entitled *The Unknown Eros and Other Odes* (1877). The reaction to this volume was also not favourable. Tennyson, who had spoken warmly of *The Angel*, failed to see any merit in it. Only a few like Francis Thompson, Browning and Edmund Gosse admired the poetry of the odes. However, with the passage of time critics realized the intrinsic qualities of these odes and, consequently, better appraisals appeared in the reviews. Hopkins was quick to discern their merit (though he did not hesitate to lay his finger where he saw a fault in Patmore's poems). He wrote to the poet of his disappointment at the state of their reception :

> And when I read Remembered Grace, The Child's purchase, Legem Tuam Dilexi and others of this volume I sigh to think that it is all one almost to be full of meaning and to have none and to see very deep and not to see at all, for nothing so deep can be found in the poets of this age, scarcely of any; and yet they are but little known and when the papers give a list of the contemporary English poets your name does not appear.[48]

The Victorians generally, it seems, could not appreciate the transcendental significance of the odes.

Before examining the odes proper, we must consider how far they constitute a composite series of poems on related themes. Frederick Page states that Alice Meynell, reacting to Newman's description of the odes as 'fragments,' stressed that "each of them is whole, and moreover complete from the beginning like a picture by Velasquez."[49] Page him-

self does not see any discernible scheme linking them together. He states the view that "*The Unknown Eros, and other Odes* is, then, a miscellany, representing at least one, and I think two, abandoned projects: 'The Marriage of the Blessed Virgin' certainly, and the completion of *The Angel in the House*, perhaps."[50] This view obviously accords with his thesis that there is no division between Patmore's domestic poems and *The Unknown Eros*. J.C. Reid looks upon each ode as an artistic whole and considers the entire series as integrally linked. In his view, even the political odes, which are satirical in tone and different in theme and atmosphere from the rest of the poems, have a place in the total scheme of *The Unknown Eros*. In our view, things absolutely mundane in nature and of contemporary relevance dwelt upon in the political odes do not seem to be compatible with the nobler themes of the other odes. Excluding the political odes (extraneous in our opinion to any possible scheme), three groups of poems are distinguishable in Bks. I and II of *The Unknown Eros, and other Odes*. Thus some odes are concerned with Nature, some with questions of death and immortality (of the physical separation of lovers through death and their reunion in heaven), while others deal more specifically with religious and transcendental themes. To say that they constitute together an integral whole would be to over-stress their unity, which is less obvious to the reader than the variety and range they present among themselves. It is more reasonable to consider them as finished 'fragments' of a loosely connected sequence, having the kind of structural unity which Tennyson's *In Memoriam* possesses.

There is a thread of continuity running through the two books of *The Unknown Eros*. This is provided by the themes common to both: virginity, and the soul's involvement in contrary experiences of pain and joy, grief and expectancy. Separation of lovers on earth holding the prospect of union in heaven and pointing to the Final Beatitude is the principal theme of *The Unknown Eros* odes as a whole. The poems convey a *sense* of the spiritual 'journey' rather than define its course clearly. Those included in Bk I present a variety of themes. In the 'Proem' Patmore sets forth his aim:

Therefore no 'plaint be mine
Of listeners none,
No hope of render'd use or proud reward,
In hasty times and hard;
But chants as of a lonely thrush's throat
At latest eve,
That does in each calm note
Both joy and grieve;
Notes few and strong and fine,
Gilt with sweet day's decline,
And sad with promise of a different sun. (p. 349.)

The poet, it seems, could visualize that the heights be aimed at would not be perceived by ordinary minds. In venturing upon the austere poetry of *The Unknown Eros*, he neither sought nor expected any popular applause. He was only keen on giving his best—the fine fruit of his contemplation on transcendental truths pursued through the years of his silence following the publication of his domestic poems.

In the First Book of *The Unknown Eros*, we find a group of poems (some of them separated by other pieces) which are sometimes referred to as the "Widower's" odes. They are undisguisedly autobiographical. They enshrine the poet's memories of Emily, and of the grief and suffering borne by him when confronted by her acute illness and death. They speak of a loss "felt and known and savoured to the lees."[51] As we shall see, they are intensely human as poems of love. We see this love in all its purity, as the most precious possession of man. And we see its true manifestation in the sacrifice and renunciation it essentially involves; we realize its significance in the joys and sorrows that accompany it. The transcendental aspect of human love was also hinted at in *The Angel* and *The Victories*; these odes *realize* what was at best hinted at earlier. In them, again, we see love and religion as one and do not perceive a distinction between the 'human' and the 'divine'. It is this quality which renders these poems mystical. Each ode deals with a particular situation, having a precise spiritual significance, which unfolds itself to the reader as he ponders it. As mystical poems, these odes depict

the Purgative phase of the Mystic Way alternating with the Illuminative.

In 'The Day After Tomorrow,' which is the first of the odes mentioned above, the poet looks back to the days of his joyful union with his beloved. In his mood of happy expectancy, he also looks forward, beyond death, to reunion with her in heaven. In contemplating the bliss of union, experienced before and promised hereafter, the poet is cheered up by his faith in the immortality of love :

> What should we say!
> It all has been before;
> And yet our lives shall now be first fulfill'd,
> And into their summ'd sweetness fall distill'd
> One sweet drop more;
> One sweet drop more, in absolute increase
> Of unrelapsing peace. (p. 357.)

The Biblical overtones of the following lines enhance the religious significance of love :

> One day's controlled hope, and then one more,
> And on the third our lives shall be fulfill'd. (p. 357.)

'Tristitia,' the poem immediately following 'The Day After Tomorrow,' dwells on the theme of love in its austere aspect. It celebrates the true lover's tremendous capacity for suffering and sacrifice which enables him to abide, amidst pain and sorrow, away from his beloved in the full knowledge that hers has been a happier lot in winning a place in heaven. The poet fancies his loved one assured of a heavenly destiny, himself doomed to inhabit the region of *Tristitia* (to atone for his sins). The love for his beloved emboldens him to seek an assurance from her :

> Promise me this :
> If thou alone should'st win
> God's perfect bliss,
> And I, beguiled by gracious-seeming sin,

Say, loving too much thee,
Love's last goal miss,
And any vows may then have memory,
Never, by grief for what I bear or lack,
To mar thy joyance of heav'n's jubilee. (p. 359.)

Edmund Gosse considers 'Tristitia' as "the more mystical, but still very human and direct," linking the human odes with "the austerer numbers of *The Unknown Eros*."[52] The next of the group, 'The Azalea,' is full of the poet's intense pain on the death of his loved one. His recollection of her sweetness and charm is stimulated by the fragrant Azalea and the "chance-found letter," the objects associated in his mind with her memory. In this superb ode, the heart speaks in accents conveying an extremely intense emotion. The fragrance of the Azalea has a symbolic significance : it corresponds to the memory of the loved one preserved in the depths of the poet's soul. The next poem 'Departure' is patently autobiographical, looking back to the passing away of Emily. It recaptures the poet's confused state of mind in the face of the approaching loss. In its sheer poignancy the poem is matchless. In J.M. Cohen's words, "Nothing in all Victorian literature, except *In Memoriam*, is more deeply felt than the poem 'Departure."[53] What can be more deeply moving than these lines :

It was not like your great and gracious ways !
Do you, that have naught other to lament,
Never, my Love, repent
Of how, that July afternoon,
You went,
With sudden, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
Upon your journey of so many days,
Without a single kiss, or a good-bye? (pp. 362-63.)

'Euridice' departs from the rest of the sequence in its use of the Greek myth—Orpheus' search for his wife—and gives expression to the poet's sense of regret over the fancied

'neglect' of his wife. 'The Toys' (referred to in Chapter II) and 'The Child's Purchase' included in Bk II of *The Unkown Eros* are the only poems devoted to children. For its simplicity, sincerity and depth of feeling, 'The Toys' has been much anthologized. Through a familiar situation the poet presents an analogy between love and the gracious attitude of God towards His erring 'children,' reminding us of Herbert's 'The Collar.' 'Tired Memory,' the sequel to 'The Toys,' reveals subtly the poet's inward struggle to find a moral justification in his taking a second wife. It is human in its acceptance of the fading of a dear memory though cherished with the most sincere devotion :

> The stony rock of death's insensibility
> Well'd yet awhile with honey of thy love
> And then was dry;
> Nor could thy picture, nor thy empty glove,
> Nor all thy kind, long letters, nor the band
> Which really spann'd
> Thy body chaste and warm,
> Thenceforward move
> Upon the stony rock their wearied charm. (p. 366.)

The theme of separation by death is taken up again in 'If I were Dead'. The poem is retrospective in mood, recalling the words spoken by the dead wife to her husband as anticipatory of his becoming a widower. It reaffirms the poet's belief in the power of love, as it enables him to be prepared to forego even the delights of heaven if they, by any chance, have not fallen to his beloved's lot. 'A farewell,' the last of the odes on human themes, reveals the poet's acceptance of physical separation by death as an inevitable fact. It starts on a note of stoic resignation, followed by a recognition of the reality of grief which separation entails. The poem, however, ends on an optimistic note—the belief in the probability of ultimate reunion :

> Perchance we may,
> Where now this night is day,
> And even through faith of still averted feet,

Making full circle of our banishment,
Amazed meet;
The bitter journey to the bourne so sweet
Seasoning the termless feast of our content
With tears of recognition never dry. (p. 378.)

Thus we find that the odes contained in Bk I of *The Unknown Eros* mostly deal with the themes of death and immortality in relation to human love. The poems signify the purgative value of love as essential to the soul's ultimate salvation through divine grace. They are preceded in Bk I by 'St. Valentine's Day,' 'Wind and Wave' and 'Winter'—the three poems which have already been discussed (in the previous chapter) as illustrative of Patmore's Nature symbolism. Together, the two groups of poems explore the role and significance of love in human life and in man's relationship with Nature. Of the three Nature poems, 'Winter' is particularly concerned with mystical contemplation. Another significant sequence of three odes—'Faint Yet Pursuing,' 'Victory in Defeat' and 'Remembered Grace'—closes the First Book of *The Unknown Eros*. The poems dwell on that phase of mystical contemplation which is generally distinguished as the 'Dark Night of the Soul.' In our discussion of Thompson's use of imagery (borrowed from falconery) in 'By Reason of the Law' in the preceding chapter, we pointed out how Patmore too presents the 'dark night' phase in 'Faint Yet Pursuing' through the use of imagery drawn from archery. 'Remembered Grace' shows how the soul, having received divine grace once, perseveres on the spiritual path, never losing the sense of direction in the midst of obstacles :

But constantly his soul
Points to it its pole
Ev'n as the needle points, and knows not why;
And, under the ever-changing clouds of doubt,
When others cry,
'The stars, if stars there were
Are quench'd and out!'
To him, uplooking t'ward the hills for aid,

Appear, at need display'd,
Gaps in the low-hung gloom, and, bright in air,
Orion or the Bear. (p. 390.)

All the three poems are believed to owe their inspiration to St. John of the Cross. Together with the two pieces, 'Beta' (inserted among the 'human' odes) and 'Vesica Piscis' (the last poem in Bk I), they are closer to the religious odes contained in Bk II of *The Unknown Eros*. 'Beta,' using an analogy drawn from science (the dispersion of white light into seven colours), presents Patmore's view regarding the significance of the Incarnation—that the Infinite, being formless, cannot be known and apprehended except in conjunction with the Finite. In purely Christian terms, it means that the Father can only be reached through the Son. 'Vesica Piscis' shows the aspirant, having laboured himself to exhaustion, suddenly delighted with the divine Presence. The poem takes up the theme of "Simon's coin within the fish" as signifying the truth that the only way to attain God is to discover Him in the soul, suggested through the belief that the body is the temple of God. The Illuminative stage of the Mystic Way is now clearly in sight.

Bk II opens with 'To the Unknown Eros,' which gives us an idea of the shift of emphasis from the themes dealt with in Bk I to the more transcendental ones aimed at in the poems that follow. The title provides clues to the two important characteristics of the kind of poetry we are going to be presented with : the term 'Unknovn' signifies the poet's preoccupation with divine transcendence and 'Eros' suggests the shift of emphasis to sacred love. In Bk I it was the human and the natural that were of prime concern though they pointed the way to the supernatural; in Bk II it is the supernatural which is going to be Patmore's dominant concern. The poet is aiming at a leap from the realm of the known to that of the unknown. He is conscious of the loftier quality of the poetry he is now going to offer :

What rumour'd heavens are these
Which not a poet sings,
O, unknown Eros? What this breeze

Of sudden wings
Speeding at far returns of time from interstellar space
To fan my very face,
And gone as fleet,
Through delicatest ether feathering soft their solitary beat,
With ne'er a light plume dropped, nor any trace
To speak of whence they came, or whither they part?
(p. 392.)

The poet leaves us in no doubt that the god who is inspiring him to song, and whom he is going to celerate, is a divinity worthy of the hightest religious adoration. He fears, perhaps, that the name 'Eros,' associated in popular imagination with Greek mythology, may diminish the seriousness of his theme in the eyes of his readers. He, therefore, makes it plain that true to the spirit of the 'Song of Songs' (as is implied), he is going to sing of the soul's relation to the Divine in the language of love :

Thou art not Amor; or, if so, yon pyre,
That waits the willing victim, flames with vestal fire;
Nor mooned Queen of maids; or, if thou'rt she,
Ah, then, from Thee
Let Bride and Bridegroom learn what kisses be! (p. 393.)

In conclusion, the poet stresses that renunciation (and not hankering after the things of the sense) is the right attitude that one should cultivate as an aspirant to the grace of this divinity :

'There lies the crown
Which all thy longing cures.
Refuse it, Mortal, that it may be yours !
It is a Spirit, though it seems red gold;
And such may no man, but by shunning, hold.
Refuse it, till refusing be despair;
And thou shall feel the phantom in thy hair.' (p. 394.)

In *The Angel*, true 'virginity' was shown as not being incompatible with the married state. Purity of soul and a

strict observance of the marriage vows were described as essential to the spiritual condition which promises the fruit sought by those who insist on celibacy. This theme takes on a fresh significance in 'The Contract.' Using the myth of Adam and Eve, the poem shows the First Couple enacting their 'mutual free contract/Of virgin spousals.' The 'contract' commits them to a denial of the delights of earthly love in exchange for those of divine love. Suggesting, towards the conclusion of the poem, that the 'contract' between the first man and the first woman is yet to be fulfilled, Patmore hopefully looks forward to the longed for goal :

> Until a heaven-caress'd and happier Eve
> Be join'd with some glad Saint
> In like espousals, blessed upon Earth,
> And she her Fruit forth bring;
> No numb, chill-hearted, shaken-witted thing,
> 'Plaining his little span,
> But of proud virgin joy the appropriate birth,
> The Son of God and Man. (p. 397.)

The poem stresses religious commitment to a life of discipline and control. Concerned evidently with the Purgative stage of the Mystic Way, it hints also at the delights of mystical union.

Patmore had explained the full implications of the nuptial analogy--depicting the soul as the spouse of God—in his prose essay entitled *Sponsa Dei.* On the observation made by Hopkins that "it was telling secrets," the poet burnt the draft so that it never saw the light of day. Edmund Gosse, who had gone through the manuscript, was of the view that the essay neatly expressed Patmore's nuptial philosophy. It is a pity that this document is lost, yet one can surmise the views expressed there from scattered reflections in *The Rod, The Root and The Flower* and *Religio Poetae*. A poem of the same title as the lost prose essay finds place in Bk II of *The Unknown Eros*. It is of central importance inasmuch as it epitomises the mystical concepts expressed in the other odes. The key concept of the soul visualized as the Bride of Christ is explicitly presented :

O, Heart, remember thee,
That Man is none,
Save One.
What if this Lady be thy Soul, and He
Who claims to enjoy her sacred beauty be,
Not thou, but God; and thy sick fire
A female vanity,
Such as a Bride, viewing her mirror'd charms,
Feels when she sighs, 'Ah these are for his arms!' (p. 404.)

Religious themes humanized are presented in 'Legem Tuam Dilexi' and 'To The Body.' Both the poems are close to the manner of the Divine poets of the seventeenth century in combining argumentative subtlety with religious fervour. They are typical of Patmore as a Christian mystic, who sees the Infinite as meaningfully expressed only through the Finite. The human body is to him a visible manifestation of divinity, which, but for the Incarnation, would have remained 'unknown.' In 'Legem Tuam Dilexi' the poet puts forth his favourite thesis, well argued here, that freedom and joy cannot be sustained but for the bounds imposed by the law. Thus all things in the universe, not excluding the smallest ones, remain in their shape only because they are subject to the law :

But for compulsion of strong grace,
The pebble in the road
Would straight explode,
And fill the ghastly boundlessness of space. (p. 405.)

The key-note of the poem is struck in the lines suggesting that God willingly takes upon himself bonds in order to reveal His grace to man. The theme of nuptial love is also brought in :

And these
Mean Man,
Darling of God, whose thoughts but live and move
Round him; Who woos his will
To wedlock with His own, and does distill
To that drop's span
The atta of all rose-fields of all love! (p. 406.)

The Christian concepts of the Incarnation and the poet's favourite theme of nuptial union as also the notion of man's innate divinity are all compressed in the ode 'To the Body,' reinforcing the parallel concepts dealt with in 'Legem Tuam Dilexi.' Both the poems illuminate important aspects of the theme of mystical union.

The theme of virginity is again taken up, and its true character and significance elaborately defined, in 'Deliciae Sapientiae De Amore.' The poem conveys a feeling of joy reflecting the ecstatic delights which accompany the experience of mystical union. Consistent with the poet's usual practice, the language of earthly nuptials, heightened here to the point of excellence, is used to suggest the incommunicable bliss of Celestial nuptials :

O, spousals high;
O, doctrine blest,
Unutterable in even the happiest sigh;
This know ye all
Who can recall
With what welling of indignant tears
Love's simpleness first hears
The meaning of his mortal covenant,
And from what pride comes down
To wear the crown
Of which 'twas very heaven to feel the want.
How envies he the ways,
Of yonder hopeless star,
And so would laugh and yearn
With trembling lids eterne,
Ineffably content from infinitely far
Only to gaze
On his bright Mistress's responding rays,
That never know eclipse;
And, once in his long year,
With praeternuptial ecstasy and fear,
By the delicious law of that ellipse,
Wherein all citizens of ether move,
With hastening pace to come

Nearer, though never near,
His Love
And always inaccessible sweet Home;
There on his path doubly to burn. (pp. 412-13.)

The happy tone of the poem and the flowing rhythms convey a feeling of the spiritual truths which the poet is trying to communicate. When Patmore pays tributes to virginity, it is Mary, the blessed Virgin, whom he has in mind; in this poem he associates Mary Magdalene with her. As stated earlier, he emphasizes inward purity of the soul and attaches less significance to the notion of virginity as a physical condition :

Love makes the life to be
A fount perpetual of virginity.

The 'pleasure-house' image (linked with divine nuptials), which was earlier used in 'To the Body,' is paralleled by the Palace image given a prominent place in 'Deliciae Sapientiae De Amore'. It is appropriate to the dignity the poet associates with the virgin soul as the spouse, and not the servant, of God. 'Auras of Delight' matches 'Deliciae Sapientiae De Amore' in cheerfulness of tone and atmosphere. It is a paradisal poem speaking of the poet's childhood vision of love—of the transcendental region of joy approachable to one who is prepared to bear the ordeals on the path. The image of the dove "tangled in fruitful nuptials with a snake" conveys the spiritual significance of pain as an essential component of the experience leading to the ecstasy of mystical union. The theme of pain and ecstasy known to the mystics dominates the 'Psyche' odes which follow. The use of the nuptial image in them was discussed in the last chapter as an illustrative example. The 'naked' sexuality of these odes shocked even some of the Catholic admirers of the poet such as Aubrey de Vere and Cardinal Newman. Newman openly disapproved of them for "mixing up amorousness with religion." Even Hopkins, although he was struck by the "novelty and beauty" of the poems, reserved his judgement on them on the same account. Patmore was convinced that his poems were not rightly understood or did not evoke a favourable response. He wrote to Thompson :

> I am too concrete and intelligible. I fear greatly lest what I have written may not do more harm than good by exposing divine realities to prophane apprehensions.[54]

On the whole, the response to these poems has been mixed; yet perceptive readers have not failed to see their merit and have appreciated the significance of their symbolism. It is on account of this symbolism that Shane Leslie finds "The Psyche series . . . unique in English poetry".[55] Edmund Gosse is of the view that in these odes "Patmore's genius may be said to have culminated."[56] The concepts represented symbolically in these poems can be traced to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bernard. As mentioned earlier, Saint Thomas saw the relationship expressed in the 'Song of Songs' as that between Christ and Church. He extended the relationship to the individual soul and Patmore evidently followed him. Part of the inspiration can be traced to the writings of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa. Pysche, as conceived by Patmore, is as much the Virgin as the individual soul; she is the spouse of God. She is overwhelmed by the love Eros bestows on her as an act of grace. This can be explained, in Patmore's words expressed elsewhere, as the "mystic craving in the great to become the love-captive of the small."[57] The following lines in 'Eros and Psyche' pointedly express the same view :

> 'Tis but in such captivity
> The unbounded Heav'ns know what they be ! (p. 423.)

St. John of the Cross has also spoken of God's love for the soul in similar terms.

In many of his odes, Patmore speaks in the first person. But in *The Angel* and *The Victories*, he uses the impersonal mode of narration, which is again followed in the 'Psyche' poems cast into the form of a dialogue—between Eros and Psyche in 'Eros and Psyche' and 'Psyche's Discontent,' and between Psyche and her mother Pythoness in 'De Natura Deorum'. The first of these poems begins with a significant image of the 'Bird' and the 'net.' Love as a 'game' or 'hunt' is a familiar theme in mystical literature and the 'Bird' is also a symbol for the

Beloved in Sufi mysticism, carrying associations of the paradisal state. Psyche says :

> Long did I muse what service or what charms
> Might lure thee, blissful Bird, into mine arms;
> And nets I made,
> But not of the fit things. (p. 419.)

Psyche's strategems to catch the 'Bird' prove futile and she realizes that she must "lie still." The soul has to cultivate the state of passivity and learn to submit to the will of the Lord before she can attain full union with Him. St. John of the Cross's experience confirms this view. The passive receptivity of Psyche is rewarded. Eros appears and speaks to her thus :

> Ah, Psyche, guess'd you nought
> I craved to be caught? (p. 419.)

The image of bird-catching is repeated here. Psyche's craving for union and its fulfilment are pointers to the spiritual states of pain and ecstasy experienced by the mystic. She addresses Eros thus :

> Kiss me again, thy Wife and Virgin too !
> O Love, that, like a rose,
> Deckest my breast with beautiful repose,
> Kiss me again, and clasp me round the heart,
> Till fill'd with thee am I
> As the cocoon is with the butterfly. (p. 420.)

Of the erotic images in the lines above, that of the rose is specially significant. Readers familiar with Sufi poetry will at once associate it with the image of the rose garden, symbolizing consummation of the mystical experience. This image has also been absorbed into the European tradition; we find it, for example, in Dante's *Paradiso* and in St. John of the Cross. God's gift of love to Psyche is "The flame . . . pure"; the 'flame' signifies the pain and penance the mortal must undergo to achieve 'deification.' St. Bernard speaks of the "consuming

fire of God." Eros demands this penance of Psyche:

> My Darling, know
> Your spotless fairness is not match'd in snow,
> But in the integrity of fire. (p. 421.)

The fire-symbol is again used and receives reinforcement in the lines spoken by Psyche :

> 'O, too much joy; O, touch of airy fire;
> O, turmoil of content; O, unperturb'd desire,
> From founts of spirit impell'd through brain and blood !
> (p. 422.)

'De Natura Deoram' handles the theme of pain and ecstasy in detail, bringing out its spiritual implications that have a psychological validity. Statements like 'pain is/the exceedingly keen edge of Bliss' illuminate the psychological states associated with the mystical states of exaltation and deprivation. The poem employs the 'dark night' images more extensively than 'Eros and Psyche' does; the images show the pervasive influence of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa. The conversation between Eros and Psyche continues in 'Psyche's Discontent.' We see Psyche on terms of intimacy with her Lord. Though advanced in the love of God, which has now taken complete possession of her, she cannot stand its burden yet and seeks temporary relief from it. In the language of mysticism, she is to undergo the ordeals of the pre-Unitive stage. She expostulates with Eros :

> 'Enough, enough, embroisal plumed Boy!
> My bosom is aweary of thy breath.
> Thou kissest joy
> To death.
> Have pity of my clay-conceived birth
> And maiden's simple mood,
> Which longs for ether and infinitude,
> As thou being God, cravest littleness and earth!
> ....
> Me, to quite other custom life-inured,

Ah, loose from thy caress.
'Tis not to be endured!
Undo thine arms and let me see the sky
By this infatuating flame obscured. (pp. 431-32.)

The erotic figures in the first two poems of the 'Psyche' sequence, are repeated in 'Psyche's Discontent.' The images of physical union—the 'embrace' and the 'kiss,' suggesting mystical states, keep recurring. Love is the 'infatuating flame' which obscures the 'senses'—the 'Uncreate Light' or 'Divine Dark' passing human understanding. Psyche speaks to Eros :

Thou com'st like bolt from the blue, invisibly.
With premonition none nor any sign,
And, at a gasp, no choice nor fault of mine,
Possess'd I am with thee
Ev'n as a sponge is by a surge of the sea. (p. 433.)

The analogy of the sponge 'possess'd. . . by a surge of the sea,' traceable to the account of the mystical experience given by St. Teresa, parallels the analogies of physical union mentioned earlier. Sexual in suggestion, it points to the state of mystical union between the soul and God.

In such poems as the 'Psyche' odes, Patmore aimed at conveying experiences related to "that region of religion which is inexpressible in human language to the human heart."[58] Some readers may find it difficult to perceive the underlying meaning of the symbolism used here, steeped as it is in sexual terminology. It is also likely that they may find this poetry 'fleshly'. One needs to be familiar with Christian mystical theology to appreciate the symbolic significance of such an overtly sexual language. Though we cannot be in full agreement with J.M. Cohen, who draws attention to what he calls "Patmore's weakness to speak of things a little beyond his perceptions, things that he knew of but could not taste,"[59] the fact remains that his hand ling of sexual symbolism in the 'Psyche' poems is not entirely satisfactory; the poems do not fully capture the spirit of the 'Song of Songs' which provides the model for such symbolism.

The Ode on 'Pain' follows the 'Psyche' sequence. It reveals Patmore's mature insights as a psychologist of love, seeing pain as 'Close next of kin/To joy and heart's delight.' Mystics and lovers have always stressed the purgative value of pain and it is in this sense that 'the pangful, purging fire' is described in the poem as a spiritual necessity.

Patmore's religious adoration of womanhood, idealized in the person of the Virgin Mother, reaches its highest mark in 'The Child's Purchase.' The poem is a hymn to the Virgin; it is not only charged with an intense devotional feeling but reveals the poet's grasp of the mystical implications of the Christian doctrines. Here Patmore pays his final tribute to virginity. "In the Blessed Virgin Mary he sees the perfection of virginity, of married love and of the love of God, as well as the supreme expression of the meaning of Incarnation."[60] As a poem of meditation on the spiritual glory of the Virgin, the ode could be related to an earlier tradition of religious poetry influenced by the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. Patmore's Catholic conviction rings in the following lines which describe the Virgin as the fount of poetic inspiration :

> Mother, who lead'st me still by unknown ways,
> Giving the gifts I know not how to ask,
> Bless thou the work
> Which, done, redeems my many wasted days,
> Makes white the murk,
> And crowns the few which thou wilt not dispraise,
> When clear my Songs of Lady's graces rang
> And little guess'd I 'twas of thee I sang! (p. 443.)

With the publication of *The Unknown Eros aud Other Odes* (1877), Patmore's poetic career came virtually to an end. Already in some of the odes in Bk II of the volume, the reader can sense, at places, that the poet is straining himself in trying to speak of things and experiences beyond ordinary comprehension, almost "trembling before the invasion of silence."[61] This may be detected in the rhythmic movement of the lines themselves. In 'The Child's Purchase,' mentioned earlier, the

Blessed Virgin, imagined as Wisdom transcending language, is identified with Silence :

> O, Silence full of wonders
> More than by Moses in the Mount were heard,
> More than were utter'd by the Seven Thunders;
> Silence that crowns, unnoted, like the voiceless blue,
> The loud world's varying view,
> And in its holy heart the sense of all things ponders!
> (p. 439.)

This shows the poet's awareness of the mystic heights he was struggling to scale and his acute consciousness of the limits of poetic communication. It is understandable why he never wrote the ambitious poem on the Blessed Virgin he had contemplated : he had realized the difficulty (rather the near impossibility) of putting into words what is experienced at the height of mystical contemplation. Many of the poet's prose statements on mysticism show that his insights had progressed even beyond the point reached in his later poetry. Thus, in one of his essays he wrote :

> There is a poetic region—the most poetical of all—which is incapable of taking the form of poetry.[62]

The Unknown Eros aimed at this "region." Many odes show the poet almost "poised on the brink of eternal silence."[63] Two poems in *The Unknown Eros* are directly concerned with the difficulties of linguistic communication in relation to the Divine : 'Prophets who cannot sing,' and 'Dead language.' Patmore voices this feeling in the concluding lines of the latter ode :

> These thoughts, which you have sung
> In the vernacular,
> Should be, as others of the Church's are,
> Decently cloak'd in the Imperial Tongue.
> Have you no fears
> Lest, as Lord Jesus bids your sort to dread,

> You acorn-munchers rend you limb from limb,
> You, with Heaven's liberty affronting theirs !
> So spoke my monitor, but I to him,
> 'Alas, and is not mine a language dead?' (p. 444.)

It is only natural that towards the conclusion of *The Unknown Eros* odes, Patmore should have realized the inadequacy of language as a medium for communicating transcendental truths. He eventually passed from words to 'silence'—which was his good-bye to poetry. In a letter to Hopkins he expresses himself explicitly in this regard:

> But I have written all that I had to say and as well as I could : and I must rest content. I spend many hours a day meditating on my love line, but that line has carried me further and further away from the thoughts that can or ought to be spoken. I do not think, however, that I am uselessly employed. Don't you think that a soul which has filled itself very full of a great unspoken and unspeakable thought may, if it attains to its last end, teach the world by uttering it into the hearts of men in some more powerful way than words?[64]

In conclusion, mention may be made of the irregular ode 'Amelia' which is a significant poem in two ways : (i) as a poem narrative in form, reminiscent of Patmore's narrative poems of the Protestant period, and (ii) as linkable with *The Unknown Eros* odes as far as its metrical form is concerned. The poem deals with the theme of womanhood and virginity, presented through a simple story : a middle-aged widower leads his fiancee, Amelia, to the grave of his dead wife, Millicent. It is more essentially connected with the 'human' odes which are saturated with Patmore's memory of his first wife. The poet considered 'Amelia' as his "greatest achievement" and the claim is not unmerited. Most of the qualities which distinguish Patmore as a poet are present in it—his special skill in writing the odes, his response to Nature, his sure command of the language appropriate to the simple story handled here with ingenuity and, above all, his lyrical resourcefulness. Passion

and innocence, found associated in sacred love, are portrayed here convincingly; the picture presented evokes the memory of paradise.

The examination of Patmore's poems attempted in this chapter has shown that he writes of his experience of human and divine love in the language of the mystics. The mysticism which his poetry illustrates is largely erotic in character. As an adventurer in the realm of sacred love, he communicates profound experiences. His poetic vision provides clues to his progress on the Mystic Way, and it has been shown, on the basis of the textual evidence available, that the vision is largely connected with the Purgative and Illuminative stages. The evidence of the rapture of mystical union and of the pain to be gone through as a necessary step to spiritual illumination is unmistakably there in the odes. They carry further a promise of the Unitive experience. This is supported by the poet's final disposition in favour of silent contemplation.

NOTES

1 The famous Dutch mystic, Ruysbroek, emphasizes "tranquility" and "activity" as the dual, complementary characteristics of the Absolute. His accounts of the spiritual adventure present a beautiful synthesis of the transcendental and immanental positions. See Eveylyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 37. & p. 304.
2 For details, see Eveylyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 169-70.
3 Itrat Hussain, commenting, for example, on the mysticism of Thomas Traherne, states : "We do not find the three stages of mystical life—purgation, illumination and union—in any marked degree or in regular order in Traherne's life." See his *Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century*, p. 294.
4 Caroline Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English Literature* (1913; reissued London : Keni Kat Press, 1970), p. 20.
5 *Principle in Art, Religio Poetae and Other Essays*, p. 159.
6 *The Rod, The Root and The Flower*, ed. Derek Patmore (1950; rpt. Freeport, New York : Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p. 50.
7 Caroline Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English Literature*, p. 11
8 Coventry Patmore, *The Rod, The Root and The Flower*, p. 81.
9 Quoted in Shane Leslie, *Studies in Sublime Failure* (London : Earnest Benn. Ltd., 1932), p. 33.
10 *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 50.

11 Coventry Patmore, *The Rod, The Root and The Flower*, p. 99.
12 *Mysticism* in *English Literature*, pp. 31-32.
13 J.C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 69.
14 *Principle in Art, Religio Paetae and Other Essays*, p. 347.
15 *The Rod, The Root and the Flower*, p 120.
16 This is testified to by Gosse : "Coleridge had propounded the formula, the Father is Thesis, the Son anti-thesis; the Holy Spirit synthesis. Patmore accepted and adapted this to the requirements of his sexual symbolism, defining Godhead as Thesis, Manhood as anti-thesis and the Neutor, 'which is not the absence of the life of sex, but its fulfilment and power' as synthesis." See *Coventry Patmore*, p. 236.
17 *Principle in Art, Religio Poetae and Other Essays*, p. 338.
18 *The Rod, The Root and The Flower*, p. 110.
19 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
20 *Principle in Art, Religio Poetae and Other Essays*, p. 341.
21 *The Rod, The Root and The Fower*, p. 113.
22 C.C. Abbott, in his introduction to the correspondence between Hopkins and Patmore, attacks what he looks upon as Patmore's "Sultan-like conception of woman and her sphere." J.C. Reid, drawing attention to this criticism, and that of Miss Crawford (whom he quotes as having said of the poet that "he never gave a thought to the feminine soul except in relation to man"), presents arguments in defence of Patmore's point of view. His main argument is that the "relationship of man and woman. . . as Patmore sees it, is based upon a difference of functions, to which he gives the name of 'inequality.'" See *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins including his Correspodence with Coventry Patmore*, ed. C.C. Abbott (1936; 2nd rev. ed. London : Faber and Faber, 1971), p. xxvii, and J.C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, pp. 139-42,

A more convincing argument that, in our view, can be advanced in support of Patmore's position is that he conceives of both the male and the female as partaking of the characteristics of the opposite sex. This resolves the difference between 'unequals,'
23 *The Rod, The Root and The Flower*, p. 68.
24 *Ibid.*, p. 149.
25 Quoted in F.L. Lucas, *Ten Victorian Poets*, p. 97.
26 *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. xxx.
27 *The Real Robert Louis Stevenson and Other Critical Essays*, p. 18.
28 See Shane Leslie, *Studies in Sublime Failure*, p. 128.
29 Quoted in Edmund Gosse, *Coventry Patmore*, pp. 62-63.
30 *Principle in Art, Religio Poetae and Other Essays*, p. 337.
31 *A Survey of English Literature*, II (London , Edward Arnold & Co., 1920), p. 101.
32 Quoted in J.C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 20.

33 John Freeman, *The Moderns* (1917; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), p. 269.
34 Oliver Elton, *A Survey of English Literature* II, p. 101.
35 Edmund Gosse, p. 73.
36 J.C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 158.
37 *Dramatis Personae* (1923; rpt. Freeport, New York : Books for Libraries Press, 1971), pp. 189-91.
38 Batho and Dobree, p. 66.
39 Frederick Page, *Patmore*, p. 74.
40 J.C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 264.
41 *Studies in Literature* (Third Series), (1929; rpt. Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 120.
42 *Ibid.*, p. 121.
43 J.M. Cohen, "Prophet Without Responsibility : A Study in Coventry Patmore's Poetry, "*Essays in Criticism*, I (1951), p. 290.
44 John Freeman, *The Moderns*, p. 274.
45 *Mysticism in English Literature*, p. 47.
46 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
47 *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 320.
48 *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 349.
49 Quoted in Frederick Page, *Patmore*, p. 108.
50 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
51 J.M. Cohen, "Prophet Without Responsibility : A Study in Coventry Patmore's Poetry," *Essays in Criticism*, I (1951), p. 292.
52 *Coventry Patmore*, p. 232.
53 "Prophet Without Responsibility : A Study in Coventry Patmore's Poetry," *Essays in Criticism*, I (1951), p. 292.
54 Quoted in Shane Leslie, p. 156.
55 *Ibid*, p. 155.
56 *Coventry Patmore*, p. 237.
57 *Principle in Art, Religio Poetae and Other Essays*, p. 347.
58 Quoted in John Freeman, p. 276.
59 "Prophet Without Responsibility : A Study in Coventry Patmore's Poetry," *Essays in Criticism* (1951), p. 292.
60 J.C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 299.
61 John Freeman, p. 295.
62 *Principle in Art, Religio Poetae and Other Essays*, p. 224.
63 J.C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 307.
64 *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. xxxv.

5

Towards "The Kingdom of God"

Several criticisms unfavourable to Francis Thompson, denying or tending to deny a positive quality to his poetic vision, seem to have been influenced by a knowledge of the unsavoury biographcial details of his life—his addiction to opium and his days of misery in London. For example, J.C. Reid maintains that much of Thompson's verse is tenuous, embodying little religious experience; he restricts his achievement as a religious poet to a few poems including 'The Hound of Heaven' and 'In No Strange Land.'[1] J.M. Cohen, taking a more balanced view, traces the strength and weakness of his poetic vision to his estrangement from human fellowship : the strength revealed in "an immediate perception of the underlying reality . . . something seen with the simplicity of a child" and the weakness betrayed by "the inanity of his secular judgements."[2] Austin Harrison questions the artistic quality of this vision on account of the poet's preoccupation with dogma. His plea is that "in the vision of the artist we want creation and not dogma; freedom, not theory; the love which is universal; we want personality. Thompson gives us only pontification; he pontificates. He is never free to sing like the lark. His very ecstasy is sacredotal."[3] This view betrays a lack of objectivity as it fails to discern Thompson's lyrical gift, acknowledged even by those who are otherwise severe on his faults.

The sympathetic reader of Thompson's poems is convinced of two things—the autobiographical character of much of his verse and the authenticity of his vision. Gained through an

acute experience of pain and sorrow (identifiable with the Christian virtues of humility and suffering), Thompson's is a vision appealingly human in its constant awareness of the fallen state of man alienated from the kingdom of God. Though he does not always engage our hearts, many of his poems are powerful expressions of the soul's craving for the state of primal innocence and joy. There are two sides to Thompson's personality : the artist delighting in the pursuit of Beauty (the inheritor of the tradition of Spenser and Keats), and the man of strong Catholic faith, which he held firmly even during the days of his abject poverty and distress. Aestheticism in him, however, never gained an upper hand. Always subordinated to the religious impulse, it was governed by an intellectual purpose as the poet progressed in religious thought. The pursuit of Beauty, as understood and practised by Thompson, was thus never divorced from his religious sense. Correspondingly, his best poems possess two essential qualities : "beauty of expression and great depth of meaning,"[4] a synthesis characteristic of all great poetry.

Thompson's parents were converts to Catholicism, and were deeply religious. In 1870, when he was eleven years old, they sent him to Ushaw College where he studied for seven years. In 1877, the spiritual authorities there (who were otherwise impressed by Thompson's performance as a student) came to the conclusion that he was not destined to be a priest. Their view was based on the evidence of the boy's "nervous timidity" and "natural indolence". He was discharged; this was perhaps his major disappointment in life. If his dreamy nature proved a disqualification for priesthood, it served his muse and later acquired significance in his achievement as a poet-mystic.

As we have mentioned earlier, Thompson's understanding of poetic symbolism (in relation to Christian mysticism) matured after he came into direct contact with Patmore. This is revealed in a number of his *New Poems* (1897), the volume he dedicated to the elder poet. Aware throughout of the intimate relation between contemplation and poetic inspiration, Thompson found himself in agreement with the maturer opinions of Patmore, followed by a positive gain in his own

insights under the latter's inspiration. We have considered some of Patmore's important statements (in *Religio Poetae* and *The Rod, The Root and The Flower*) on the affinity he sees between poetic perception and the perception of the religious seer or mystic. Let us recall one statement as an illustration :

> The poet is *par excellence*, the perceiver, nothing having any interest for him, unless he can, as it were see it and touch it with spiritual senses, with which he is permanently endowed.[5]

A near identity of views, in regard to the relation between 'Sanctity and Song,' between mystical contemplation and poetry, is reflected in what Thompson says on the subject :

(i) The insight of the poet springs from intuition, which is the highest reason, and is acquired through contemplation, which is the highest effort.[6]

(ii) The psychology of the poet, above all, (or of the musician, or, less strikingly, the artist), affords the closest natural parallel to the special psychology of the saint . . . . The weapon of the poet or saint is intuition, and contemplation is the state, the attitude, which disposes the mind to receive intuitions.[7]

(iii) In proportion to the height of their sanctity the saints are inevitable poets. Sanctity is essential song.[8]

It is evident that what is said in the above statements about the saint should be applicable to the mystic too. Mystical illumination is conceived by Thompson as the goal of poetic contemplation. This is revealed in a number of his poems concerned with his own state of spiritual deprivation. We see the poet looking forward, in this state, to the delights of a spiritual dawn in the manner of the mystics going through the experience of the Dark Night. Thompson's constant interest in contemplating the mystery of death in its bearing, particularly, on the process of poetic creation (conceived as involving an acute experience of pain) reminds us throughout of the significance attached to the concept of 'mystical death.' Poetry

and mysticism for him are closely linked; accordingly, he seeks "the promised dawn in terms of poetic inspiration."[9]

In Thompson's day, as we have said earlier, the term 'mysticism' was abused and much misunderstood. Patmore defined mysticism as the "science of ultimates" to clear away the general confusion about its meaning. He, however, used the term cautiously and sparingly. He was aware that people confused it with mere emotionalism or with what is misty and vague. Thompson too was "well aware of the dangers of false mysticism and of the possibility of its being confused with the true."[10] Patmore significantly wrote to him :

> I look to you to crush all this false mysticism. Crush it; you can do it if you like; you are the man to do it.[11]

Thompson associated clarity and precision with genuine mysticism; he did not approve of the vagueness which marked false mysticism in his day. Mysticism, in his view, does not run counter to the claims of reason :

> A mystic poet who is vaporous fancy will not go far. Every such poet should be able to give a clear and logical resume of his teaching as terse as a page of scholastic teaching.[12]

In his concern for clarity as an important characteristic of genuine mysticism, Thompson goes too far in expecting the mystic poet to give a prose "resume" of his "teaching." Poetic expressions of mystical truths or experiences cannot be subjected to *definitive* interpretations. One would rather agree with Valery, who says "where there can be a resume, there is no poetry", than accept Thompson's position on the issue. However, the point that Thompson maintains about clarity as opposed to vagueness has to be accepted as valid. But what is clearly expressed poetically need not be paraphrasable. Surprisingly Austin Harrison finds Thompson deficient in the very clarity the latter prizes in mystic poets :

> As the poet of mysticism Thompson will always appeal to the nebulous-minded, scarcely to those who seek music

in poetry or clear and profound thinking.[13]

We do not miss "clear and profound thinking" in the best specimens of Thompson's mystical verse. The reader may have to make a little effort to discover it in the indirect and suggestive language of symbolism. In fact, it is Thompson's special mark as a poet that he is able to relate the seen to the unseen; many of his poems amply illustrate that "mysticism is not the enemy of clarity."[14] Another statement of Thompson's confirms that he considered vagueness or nebulousness as alien to the character of mysticism:

> The core of mysticism is a *fact*, not an understanding or feeling. Still less is it an *endeavour* after a something nameless and unattainable. All true mystics know well about what they seek; and that it can be gained or missed according to the fidelity of their own effort. The thing sought is *Union*.[15]

As stated in Chapter III, we discern a progression in the poems of Thompson from his earlier interest in the ritualistic side of his religion to a deeper understanding of Catholic symbolism. J.M. Cohen, expressing a somewhat similar view, maintains that Thompson had "a talent for otherworldly affairs, at first religious but finally mystical."[16] In *New Poems*, as also in the poet's critical opinions, his intellectual growth is clearly reflected. Some of his earlier poems provide evidence of a certain degree of mystical perception fused with innocent belief. Then there are the early poems in which Pagan myths are freely associated with Christian themes, and the resultant poetry is powerfully mystical. New Poems, however, include the most mystical of Tompson's poems under the subtitle 'Sight and Insight.' Speaking of these poems in the cancelled Preface, the poet wrote:

> The first section exhibits mysticism in a limited and varying degree. I feel my instrument yet too imperfect to profane by it the higher ranges.[17]

In view of the overtly autobiographical character of many of Thompson's poems, including those markedly mystical, it is comparatively easy to explore the poet's progress on the Mystic Way. In Patmore's case, the evidence regarding his own level of attainment in mystical contemplation is not so directly available, for not many of his poems are frankly autobiographical. The full blaze of Illumination that we come across in many of his odes is not evident in Thompson's poetry, except in a handful of poems. We do, however, get definite glimpses of the Illuminative stage in a number of the latter's poems. In a poem or two, a state of awareness close to the Unitive experience is also not difficult to trace. On the whole, the painful note is all-pervasive and insistent in Thompson. It is the Purgative stage of the Mystic Way which is emphasized in his poems. In Patmore, the painful note attains a significant intensity in the 'human' rather than the 'religious' odes. As we have seen, some of his poetry, especially that of *The Angel*, is largely concerned with the earthly paradise. The cheerful tone of this poetry anticipates the joy of Illumination that permeates some of *The Unknown Eros* odes concerned with divine love. Thompson's lines from the cancelled Preface to *New Poems*, quoted earlier, testify to his awareness of the difficulties of the Mystic Way. He was fully concious that a rigorous ascetic discipline is the necessary preparation for progress on the path of spirituality :

> Mysticism is an interior ladder, at the summit of which is God. The mystic endeavours, by a rigid practical virtue, combined with prayer, meditation, and mortification of the senses, to arrive at a closer union with the Creator.[18]

The mysticism in Thompson is seen to take two forms—immanent and transcedental. The former is revealed in his attitude to Nature and the material universe. He takes a sacramental view of the natural world—a tendency inherent in him, which he does not owe specifically to his religious background. This links him with the general order of mystics who lean towards an " 'immanental' type of religious experience."[19] In such mystics, the tendency to find the divine presence in the things of

this world sometimes overshoots the mark, and then God is identified with the things themselves : the 'immanental' attitude 'degenerates' into pantheism and the transcendent One is completely forgotten. Thompson's Nature poems may give the casual reader the impression that he looks at the world in the manner of the pantheist; but, beyond his seemingly Pagan response to Nature, his Christian view of the natural world is also evident to the careful reader. At many places, the poet insists on the fact that Nature owes her power and glory to God. His immanental vision is thus essentially Christian in character, though it seems to shade sometimes into the pantheistic. In 'Paganism : Old and New', Thompson makes his position clear, maintaining that what the old Paganism saw only crudely acquired a spiritual content in Christianity. He has a sympathetic understanding of the Pagan view, seeing in it a precursor of the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. This reflects the *catholicity* of his outlook as a Christian and accounts for that quality of his religious sensibility—expressed in such mystical poems as the 'Orient ode'—which endears him even to those who do not share his faith. The other form that mysticism takes in him relates to his sense of the transcendent One (often the personal God of Christianity), seen as remote and not attainable. This feeling is strongly present in the poet's constant craving for the spiritual delights of the heavenly state. It is revealed to us in his sense of his own wretchedness and smallness, accentuated by his contemplation of the joys of divine union which he so passionately, and sometimes pathetically, hungers after. The transcendental aspiration (of a mystical character) is more marked in Thompson than in Patmore. In combining the immanental and transcendental attitudes, achieved in the best of his poems, Thompson exemplifies Christian mysticism thoroughly.

In the case of Patmore we dwelt (in Chapter IV) first on the mystical element in the poems of human love, *The Angel* and *The Victories*, and then traced its fuller development in the odes. We shall now proceed along somewhat similar lines in dealing with Thompson's poems though, content-wise, there could be several ways of classifying them in view of the

wider range of their themes. Broadly speaking, we could group them as (i) poems of love, (ii) poems of Nature, and (iii) religious poems. A large body of Thompson's verse, consisting of individual poems or portions thereof, is concerned with the origin and mystery of poetic inspiration—a theme in which the poet is vitally interested. This provides another important focus for studying Thompson's poetic mysticism. Even before he came into contact with the powerful mind of Patmore, he had in him all the acuteness of feeling and perception that mark the sensibility of a mystic poet. This is revealed in a number of poems not ostensibly concerned with religious themes. We find them mystical in spirit, whether concerned with the love of children or of women or with Nature. Thompson's mysticism, however, gains in depth and intensity (and consequently in authenticity) in his religious poems.

Poems of Innocence : The relation between childhood and innocence is an important theme of poetic mysticism, best represented in English poetry by Traherne, Blake and Wordsworth. Thompson can also be associated with this tradition. His poems on children and his references to childhood show something child-like in the poet himself. When Traherne and Wordsworth speak of childhood, they give us an account of their own experience : their recollection of an illuminated vision of the world. Thompson's poems do not offer this kind of experience. He pictures his childhood world as one of fantasy and dream—a kind of private heaven to which he would gladly return as an adult. But when he turns to the children themselves and celebrates his love for them, it is their state of innocence that he values most. A Christian awareness of man's primal state before the Fall, rather than mere nostelgia for the 'Eden of Infancy,' moves him to pay tributes to them. He sings of 'innocence' in accents which remind us of Blake, but when it comes to 'experience,' his vision falls short of the depth and power that distinguish Blake's prophetic vision of life : an integral vision in which 'innocence' and 'experience' find a meaningful synthesis. Viewing life from his own state of deprivation and sorrow, Thompson offers us only a onesided vision; his song of

'experience' has in it, at best, a ring of "the still sad music of humanity."

Innocence and simplicity, associated with childhood, are valued as spiritual qualities and cultivated *consciously* by persons aspiring to the mystic state. There is nothing regressive about this attitude. What is actually aimed at through this positive effort is inward purity : a cleansing of the powers of perception in the Blakean sense. Some poets and mystics are naturally gifted with this inward purity; their perception is fresh and unspoiled as the child's. This holds true of Thompson as well. It is significant that he was aware of this quality in Shelley. In his famous essay on the poet, Thompson describes him as "the enchanted child." This is how he characterizes the state of the child :

> Know you what it is to be a child? It is to be something different from the man of today. It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, for each child has its fairy god-mother in its own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and to count yourself the king of infinite space; it is.
>
> To see a world in a grain of sand,
> And heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And enternity in an hour;
>
> It is to know not as yet that you are under sentence of life, nor petition that it be commuted into death.[20]

Thompson must have unconsciously identified himself with Shelley when he described him as the "enchanted child" and paid tributes to his powers of perception. His own accounts of himself give us a clear idea of his psychological make-up and leave us in no doubt that what he has said about Shelley

is applicable in no less a degree to himself :

(i) I did not want responsibility, did not want to be a man. Toys I could surrender, with chagrin, so that I had my great toy of imagination whereby the world became to me my box of toys.[21]

(ii) There is a sense in which I have all my life been and even now remain a child. But in another sense I was never a child, never shared children's thoughts, ways, tastes, manner of life and outlook on life. I played—I never ceased to play,—but my sport was solitary sport. Even when I played, with my sisters, from the time I began to read (about my sixth year) the game often, I think, meant one thing to me and quite another to them.[22]

On the evidence of the above statements, supported further by the visionary quality of Thompson's verse, we can reasonably conclude that from his childhood he had the making of a contemplative. As a voracious reader with a contemplative bent of mind, he was destined to grow into a mystic poet of the visionary type.

We may now turn to his contemplations of the state of innocence as embodied in his 'Poems on Children' included in *Poems* (1893). Of these poems, 'Making of Viola' has already been considered in Chapter III. An important part of the Catholic tradition in which Thompson was brought up consists in celebrating childhood as symbolic of primal innocence and joy: a fact that determines the religious inspiration behind these poems. The literary influences are also traceable; the poems breathe someting of the spirit of Blake's 'Songs of Innocence' and Wordsworth's 'Lucy poems.'

'Daisy' is the first important poem of the sequence. In theme and style, it reminds the reader of Wordsworth. The poem is based on an actual experience: the poet met a simple country girl, Daisy by name, during one of his walks by the hillside in Storrington. Her tokens to the poet - "A look, a word of her winsome mouth/And a wild raspberry"—were the best expressions of the innocence she epitomised. The 'child'

in the poet was drawn by some sort of a spiritual affinity to the girl. The meeting gave him instant joy, but it simultaneously gave him a feeling of "sadness in the sweet." Having got a glimpse of the 'paradise', he had left behind, his momentary happiness was followed by the bitter realisation that what he had lost could no more be retrieved :

> She went her unremembering way,
> She went and left in me
> The pang of all the partings gone,
> And partings yet to be. (p.6.)

Largely concerned with 'innocence,' made explicit by the floral name of the child, the poem views this primal condition from the opposite pole of 'experience.' It is in this respect that the reader, with Wordsworth at the back of his mind, is also reminded of Blake. The later stanzas, and the epigrammatic ending of the poem, tell us more of what 'experience' involves.

'The Poppy,' the next poem of the sequence, is built round a theme somewhat similar to that of 'Daisy.' The incident narrated here is equally commonplace: Monica, one of the Meynell children, accompanies the poet during his walk across a field; she impulsively plucks a red poppy which she instantly offers to the latter as a gift. This contact with 'innocence' gives the poet a sense of exultation, soon followed by his sombre reflections on life's sorrows. Such an experience gave an edge to his "sense of isolation from human kind" and, in effect, intensified his craving for the unearthly joys of the spiritual realm. The reference to his "withered dreams" (somehow associated by the poet with the poppy), in the context of the theme of innocence, suggests only a deeply felt need for spiritual redress. Thompson's love for children is not just escapist, i.e., rooted in the desire for freedom from care and responsibility, as several critics would suggest. It is actually based on the spiritual significance he attaches to the state of innocence represented by childhood. His insistent references to his own unworthiness and wretchedness are but pointers to his humility—the mark of an aspirant for divine grace. This mood is specially evident in 'To My God-child,' the poem written

to mark the baptism of Francis, the last-born of the Meynell children, at which ceremony the poet was asked to act as god-father. Giving expression to a sharp sense of his own insignificance, Thompson wishes the child a better destiny than himself as a poet. However, he imagines for himself a noble destiny in heaven—a perpetuation of the state of innocence experienced on earth:

> And when, immortal mortal, droops your head,
> And you, the child of deathless song, are dead;
> Then, as you search with unaccustomed glance
> The ranks of Paradise for my countenance,
> Turn not your tread along the Uranian sod
> Among the bearded counsellors of God;
> For if in Eden as on earth are we,
> I sure shall keep a younger company : (p. 15)

Here Thompson is depicting heaven in Christian terms, a thing he does in 'The Making of Viola.' The images remind us of Rossetti. The concluding line of the poem : "Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven" (incidentally inscribed on Thompson's tomb-stone) has a ring of sincerity in it; it shows how inseparable 'heaven' and 'innocence' are for the poet. It also makes it clear that he valued childhood for purity and simplicity and not as a 'luxury.'

'Little Jesus' comes appropriately at the close of the 'Poems on Children.' The theme of innocence finds superb expression in a "deceptively simple" language which conveys the profound Christian truth concerning the Incarnation. The poem imagines a child addressing its "baby-talk" to the Holy Child. In form and spirit, it suggests comparison with Blake's 'Songs of Innocence.' Its religious theme and sentimental tone remind us of Crashaw. While J.C. Reid sees some merit in 'Little Jesus,' describing it as "the best-known" of Thompson's 'Poems on Children' having a "certain old-fashioned charm and sensibility," he is of the view that "in effectiveness, depth of insight and feeling it cannot compare with Patmore's 'The Toys,' where we find actual human truth and spiritual delicacy instead of Thompson's cuteness."[23] Although both the poems deal with

childhood, they are concerned with altogether different situations and, therefore, comparing them the way Reid does does not seem to be right. Patmore's poem dwells on the compassionate attitude of God towards His 'erring children'; strictly speaking, it is not a poem of 'innocence.' 'Little Jesus' highlights the mystery and significance of the Incarnation through a simple analogy, presented in terms of a human situation (different from that presented in 'The Toys'). The last ten lines are an excellent exposition of the fact that the language of religion is "a kind of baby-talk—an attempt to state as best our minds can what is essentially inexpressible except in symbols" :[24]

> So, a little Child, come down
> And hear a child's tongue like Thy own;
> Take me by the hand and walk,
> And listen to my baby-talk.
> To Thy Father show my prayer
> (He will look, Thou art so fair),
> And say: "O Father, I, Thy Son,
> Bring the prayer of a little one."
> And He will smile, that children's tongue
> Has not changed since Thou wast young! (pp. 17-18.)

The poem has a charm of its own in that it combines beauty of expression with delicacy of feeling and perception.

The theme of innocence is treated elaborately in Thompson's longest poem entitled *Sister Songs.* It consists of Parts I and II which celebrate the poet's love for the two Meynell children, Madeline and Monica. Published as a separate volume in 1895, it was actually composed around the year 1891 during which the poet wrote his most famous poem, 'The Hound of Heaven.' As far as craftsmanship is concerned, it does not show the poet to advantage : the language is mostly ornate and the imagery excessive ; the meaning tends to get obscured in the pile of images and incidental detail. There is no clear progression of thought, though a thread of continuity holding the images together may be discerned by the careful reader. Thompson, reclaimed by the Meynells from his state of adversity, came to love their children; he drew spiritual comfort and joy from their

presence. Owing its inspiration to the children's innocent love, and written out of a sense of gratitude to their parents, *Sister Songs* is essentially concerned with the poet's own spiritual history. Part I, devoted to Madeline, referred to as Sylvia, the younger of the two girls, is gayer in mood than the succeeding part : the references to Nature, whose blessings for the girl are invoked in the Wordsworthian spirit, contribute largely to this mood. Here is Thompson's prayer for the girl; he remembers how she offered him a kiss that brought happiness to his sad soul :

> Spring, goddess, is it thou, desired long?
> And art thou girded round with this young train?—
> If ever I did do thee ease in song,
> Now of thy grace let me one meed obtain,
> And list thou to one plain.
> Oh, keep still in thy train,
> After the years when others therefrom fade,
> This tiny, well-beloved maid!
> To whom the gate of my heart's fortalice,
> With all which in it is,
> And the shy self who doth therein immew him
> 'Gainst what loud leaguerers battaliously woo him,
> I, bribed traitor to him,
> Set open for one kiss. (p. 27.)

Also, giving us a picture of himself during his outcast days in London, he recalls how he was fed and sheltered by a prostitute who took pity on his condition. His kindly and tender references to the woman are not just sentimental. Sensible of her innate goodness, he sees the innocence and purity of a child in her. His attitude reflects the spirit of Christian charity towards this 'sinner'; it also reveals his essential humanity, and his sense of kinship with the lowly and downtrodden. Above all, the poet keenly perceives the divine in "the heart of childhood" :

> I had endured through watches of the dark
> The abashless inquisition of each star,

Yea, was the outcast mark
Of all those heavenly passers' scrutiny;
Stood bound and helplessly
For Time to shoot his barbed minutes at me;
Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour
In night's slow-wheeled car;
Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length
From under those dread wheels; and, bled of strength,
I waited the inevitable last.
Then there came past
A child; like thee, a spring-flower; but a flower
Fallen from the budded coronal of Spring,
And through the city-streets blown withering.
She passed,—O brave, sad, lovingest, tender thing!
And of her own scant pittance did she give,
That I might eat and live;
Then fled, a swift and trackless fugitive.
Therefore I kissed in thee
The heart of childhood, so divine for me;
And her, through what sore ways,
And what unchildish days,
Borne from me now, as then, a trackless fugitive. (p. 28.)

In Part II, which is addressed to Monica, the theme of childhood is linked with other themes : the nature of poetic inspiration (also touched upon in the Proem to Part I), the pursuit of ideal Beauty, and the transience of earthly things. In the manner and spirit of Shelley, Thompson contemplates the phenomenon of change and declares himself to be "Beauty's eremite," the pursuer of ideal Beauty, which he can never realize in physical form. It is only glimpsed for him in Monica's beauty, stimulating in him a craving for that love which is impossible of fulfilment on earth. Reflections of this sort are productive of a feeling bordering on the mystical (though not specifically Christian). Finally the poet thinks of the potential woman in the girl with the powers of sex now latent, but sure to be active when she comes of age. This leads him to think of Child-Christ whose spiritual powers had likewise to await the growth of his body before they could be operative. A

distinctively Christian note is struck in the following lines which dwell upon the theme of Incarnation :

> The heavens decree
> All power fulfil itself as soul in thee.
> For supreme spirit subject was to clay,
> And Law from its own servants learned a law,
> And Light besought a lamp unto its way,
> And Awe was reined in awe,
> At one small house of Nazareth;
> And Golgotha
> Saw Breath to breathlessness resign its breath,
> And Life do homage for its crown to death. (p. 39.)

Poems of Human Love : Thompson's love poems are often poems of aspiration rather than of fulfilment; they are generally not concerned with physical passion. In sharing these two qualities, they are distinguishable from the love poems of Patmore. The elder poet does not ignore the physical aspect of love even when he contemplates upon its transcendental significance. His poems (whether they deal with human or divine love) are the expression of an experience of love that involves knowledge of both its pains and delights. In relation to the object of love, he does not sing of aspiration alone but of fulfilment too. On the other hand, Thompson is essentially "the poet of pain, though not of pessimism."[25] He is the poet of "Uranian" love. When he turns his love to human beings, it does not end there but goes beyond human beings to the Divine. It symbolizes his craving for union with the Divine. For him earthly love has no ultimate significance or any value of its own. It is immediately important to the extent it shares certain qualities with, and pre-figures, divine love. For Patmore, however, human love is, besides being a precursor of divine love, also its complement. Thompson wrote in a note-book : "The function of natural love is to create a craving which it cannot satisfy."[26] This sums up his attitude to love. His admiration of woman is purely spiritual; it reflects a clerical attitude which is in sharp contrast to "Patmore's lusty enthusiasm for matrimony."[27] The beauty of woman as well as the innocence

of child brings to his soul an intimation of the ultimate Beauty. His mystical adoration of woman reflects, in a limited way, the attitude of the Persian Sufis or the Spanish poets of the seventeenth century for whom earthly love "exists only as a metaphor with which to explore the love of the Soul for the Spirit."[28] The erotic strain in Patmore's mysticism is in danger of being misunderstood when its analogical significance is overlooked or not grasped. The language of love Thompson employs is free from this danger; it does not smack of carnality or violate sanctity. The mysticism which we come across in his poems devoted to woman's praise is sacred and often other-worldly in suggestion.

In *Sister Songs* Thompson sang of innocence and womanhood together. In *Love in Diana's Lap* he pays his best tribute to womanhood. It is a sequence of poems (eleven in the definitive edition) most of which were composed around the year 1891 and included in *Poems* (1893). Alice Meynell is the woman celebrated in the sequence; she is seen almost as a divinity, sharing the graces of the Holy Mother herself. The poetry expresses Thompson's gratitude to the lady, his intense regard for her spiritual and intellectual qualities (which had made her a lovable figure in the eyes of such admirers as George Meredith and Patmore). But as the central figure in the series of poems, she does not emerge as a concrete person. The mystical adoration of Mrs. Meynell is actually an indirect song of praise to essential womanhood, reminding us sometime of Shelley's Platonic love of Beauty and sometime of Crashaw's religious devotion to the divine Mary. The language is marked by an extravagance reminiscent of the language of courtly love; the conceits employed suggest the influence of Donne. Friendly critics have been generous in comparing Thompson's love for Alice Meynell to "Petrarch's love for Laura and Dante's love for Beatrice."[29] Patmore himself described *Love in Dian's Lap* as a series of poems "which Laura might have been proud and Lucretia not ashamed to have had addressed to her."[30] At the other extreme, J.C. Reid does not rate the poems highly; in his view "the whole work is forced . . .which, while by no means devoid of sincerity, never really pierces to the heart, or comes from it."[31] Whatever the imperfections of the language

employed, the poems have a sacred tone and express a worshipful attitude towards womanhood : based on the chaste love of a child for its mother, free from any trace of sensuality and seeking fulfilment only in spiritual union.

In 'Proemion' (written in 1894 and added to the *Love in Dian's Lap* sequence in the definitive edition of the poems published after the poet's death), the poet refers to Alice Meynell as the "statued divinity" of the days of his fresh acquaintance with her, now changed (with the growth of intimate friendship between them) to "warm divinity' for him. Apprehending a failure of his poetic inspiration, the poet invokes the Muses to aid him in the singing of Love. In 'Before her Portrait in Youth,' with which the sequence proper begins, Thompson conjures up a vision of Mrs. Meynell as she must have been in the days of her youth. Using the language of conceit, involving something of Metaphysical subtlety, he fancies himself as a votary of his lady's "cast youth." He fancies further how

> On her mouth museful sweet
> (Even as the twin lips meet)
> Did thought and sadness greet;
> Sighs
> In these mournful eyes
> So put on visibilities;
> A viewless ether turns, in deep on deep, to dyes. (p. 58.)

Everard Meynell points out that "The lady Pain figures, in one sense, in 'Love in Dian's Lap'."[32] The conceit employed in the closing lines of the poem confirms this :

> The water-wraith that cries
> From those eternal sorrows of thy pictured eyes
> Entwines and draws me down their soundless intricacies.
> (p. 58.)

The next poem, 'To a poet Breaking Silence,' was written to mark the occasion of the publication of a poem by Alice Meynell written long after her marriage. Thompson sees an

inherent connection between poetic inspiration and the awakening of the soul to higher realities. This is consistent with his emphasis on the identity of 'Sanctity and Song' : the view he forcefully maintains in his essay on Shelley. Crucifixion of the little self is looked upon by him as the sole means to inward illumination; correspondingly the poet too, in his view, has to go through a painful, ascetic discipline before he attains insights of significance. He prays to Mrs. Meynell to guide him to this poetic goal :

> Ah! let the sweet birds of the Lord
> With earth's waters make accord;
> Teach how the crucifix may be
> Carven from the laurel-tree,
> Fruit of the Hesperides
> Burnish take on Eden-trees,
> The Muses' sacred grove be wet
> With the red dew of Olivet,
> And Sapho lay her burning brows
> In white Cecilia's lap of snows! (p. 59.)

In conclusion, the poet pays tributes to Mrs. Meynell's essential divinity, tracing in her poetic utterance the inevitable marks of Christian sanctity :

> Vain are all disguises! Ah,
> Heavenly *incognita!*
> Thy mien bewrayeth through that wrong
> The great Uranian House of Song!
> As the vintages of earth
> Taste of the sun that riped their birth,
> ....
> They wine is flavorous of God.
> Whatever singing-robe thou wear.
> Has the Paradisal air;
> And some gold feather it has kept
> Shows what Floor it lately swept! (p. 60.)

'Manus Animam Pinxit' reiterates Thompson's faith in the

nobility and chastity of his benefactress and in his utter spiritual dependence on her as a fount of poetic inspiration :

> . . . O be true
> To your soul, dearest, as my life to you!
> For if that soil grow sterile, then the whole
> Of me must shrivel, from the topmost shoot
> Of climbing poesy, and my life, killed through,
> Dry down and perish to the foodless root. (p. 61.)

Comparing her spirit "to that which sang "*Magnificat*," the poet claims identity of his soul with hers—a spiritual fusion of the mystical type (without the least suggestion of sensuality) :

> This soul which on your soul is laid,
> As maid's breast against breast of maid;
> Beholding how your own I have engraved
> On it, and with what purging thoughts have laved
> This love of mine from mortality.
> ....
> Unveil this spirit, lady, when you will,
> For unto all but you 'tis veiled still:
> Unveil, and fearless gaze there, you alone,
> And if you love the image—'tis your own! (p. 62.)

In 'A Carrier Song' Thompson's address to Alice Meynell continues to be reverential and worshipful; she is associated with the divine Mary :

> She that is Heaven's Queen
> Her title borrows,
> For that she, pitiful,
> Beareth our sorrows.
> So thou, *Regina mi*
> *Spes infirmorum*;
> With all our grieving crowned
> *Mater dolorum*! (p. 64.)

'Scala Jacobi Portague Eburnea' is an important mystical

poem of the sequence. Its title is Biblical. The vision of angels moving up and down Jacob's ladder, to which Mrs. Meynell's soul is compared, represents an important concept in practical mysticism. St. John of the cross speaks of this ladder as that of contemplation, signifying a gradual development of mystical love leading to union with the Divine. According to R.L. Megroz, "the 'angels, wet-eyed, tristful' are descended only from Crashaw, while the sophisticated clarity of the vision of the ladder going upto great Heaven's gate, and the cherubic faces looking down, owes something to Pre-Raphaelite influence."[33] 'Gilded Gold' dwells on the close relationship the poet perceives between Alice Meynell's physical graces and her spiritual qualities :

> So far thy spirit did devise
> Its Maker seemly garniture,
> Of its own essence parcel pure,—
> From grave simplicities a dress,
> And reticent demurenesses,
> And love encinctured with reserve;
> Which the woven vesture should subserve. (p. 66.)

Thompson sees no use for him in the lady's taking resort to rich adornments and, therefore, makes this appeal to her :

> Where a sweetness is complete,
> Add not sweets unto the sweet!
> Or, as thou wilt, for others so
> In unfamiliar richness go;
> But keep for mine acquainted eyes
> The fashions of thy Paradise. (p. 67.)

'Her Portrait' is the most important and elaborate of Thompson's poems of praise to Mrs. Meynell. The poet's compliments to the lady gain in depth, capturing, at places, the spirit of Donne's tributes to lady Drury. The affinity is reflected in the opening lines :

> Oh, but the heavenly grammar did I hold

> Of that high speech which angels' tongues turn gold!
> So should her deathless beauty take no wrong,
> Praised in her own great kindred's fit and cognate tongue
> Or if that language yet with us abode
> Which Adam in the garden talked with God! (p. 67.)

Thompson emphasizes in this poem, as elsewhere too, the close connection between Sanctity and Song. Any attainment in either of these two realms is viewed as the result of a mystical union. Thus spiritual attainment proceeds from the union of the soul with God; it arises from a state in which the polarity of the two sexes is resolved. This union could be found in undivided human nature, common to man and woman : in the true condition of the soul before the Fall. On this analogy, an attainment in the realm of poetry should result from a harmonious relation between the soul and the Muse. In his chaste love for Alice Meynell, Thompson sees a binding force that would contribute to his spiritual as well as poetic growth. The ideas seem to be Patmorean in inspiration, but, in Thompson's case, they have reference only to Uranian love :

> At the rich odours from her heart that rise,
> My soul remembers its lost Paradise,
> And antenatal gales blow from Heaven's shores of spice;
> I grow essential all, uncloaking me
> From this encumbering virility,
> And feel the primal sex of heaven and poetry :
> And, parting from her, in me linger on
> Vague snatches of Uranian antiphon. (p.69.)

> How to the petty prison could she shrink
> Of femineity?—Nay, but I think
> In a dear courtesy her spirit would
> Woman assume, for grace to womanhood. (p. 69.)

The language of courtly love, enlivened by images and analogies reminiscent of the Metaphysicals, is used effectively in lines such as these :

> The rustle of a robe hath been to me

The very rattle of love's musketry;
Although my heart hath beat the loud advance,
I have recoiled before a challenging glance,
Proved gay alarms where warlike ribbons dance,
And from it all, this knowledge have I got,—
The whole that others have, is less than they have not;
All which makes other women noted fair,
Unnoted would remain and overshone in her. (p. 71.)

The concluding stanza of 'Epilogue to the Poet's Sitter' faintly captures the spirit of Patmore's glorification of womanhood:

Such sweet captivity, and only such,
In you, as in those golden bars, we touch!
Our gazes for sufficing limits know
The firmament above, your face below:
Our longings are contented with the skies,
Contented with the heaven, and your eyes.
My restless wings, that beat the whole world through,
Flag on the confines of the sun and you;
And find the human pale remoter of the two. (p. 73.)

'Domus Tua' is absolutely Patmorean in conception and Biblical in association. 'In Her Paths' and the other two pieces 'After Her Going' and 'Beneath a Photograph,' express a devotion paralleled by Crashaw's accorded to the blessed Virgin or St. Teresa. Thompson sees the relation of child and mother as a prototype of his relation with the Divine. His love for Alice Meynell also he sees in the same light, as the concluding stanza of 'In Her Paths' bears out:

Ah, foolish pools and meads! you did not see
Essence of old, essential pure as she,
For this was even that Lady, and none other,
The man in me calls 'Love', the child calls 'Mother.'
(p. 74.)

Another sequence of poems entitled *Ultima*, included in *New Poems* (1897), is a sequel to *Love in Dian's Lap* (as affirmed by Alice Meynell herself). Composed during Thompson's

stay at Pantasaph, a few years after the earlier sequence was written, the *Ultima* pieces reflect a change of mood and tone, though the devotional strain is still there. These poems reveal a more careful handling of the medium: the language is less extravagant than that of the former series. On the whole, however, *Ultima* is a less impressive performance: the pieces fail to make an impact on the reader as they lack in the fervour and authenticity of feeling of *Love in Dian's Lap*. Thompson himself does not seem to have thought highly of them; he was not enthusiastic about their inclusion in *New Poems*. However, they are significant in that they reflect a slight shift in the poet's personal devotion to Mrs. Meynell, about whom he said : "Through her was shown me the uttermost of what love could be—the possible divinities and celestial prophecies of it."[34] In 'Ultimum,' the last of the *Ultima* sequence, the poet professes a dispassionate love for the lady, aware that it points the way to a higher love above personal 'idolatory' :

> And, Lady, thus I dare to say,
> Not all with you is passed away!
> Beyond your star, still, still the stars are bright;
> Beyond your highness, still I follow height;
> Sole I go forth, yet still to my sad view,
> Beyond your trueness, Lady, Truth stands true. (p. 215.)

In the poems discussed in this chapter so far, we have tried to bring out the essential qualities of Thompson's attitude to human love. We attempted to show that whether directed to child or woman, his love is not of the worldly sort; it is sacred and tends to be mystical. We will turn our attention now to his poems which deal with normal love between man and woman. In regard to the role he had visualized for himself as a lover, it will be appropriate to quote Thompson himself:

> It was my practice from the time I left college, to pray for the lady whom I was destined to love– the unknown She. It is curious that even then I did not dream of praying for her whom I was destined to marry, and yet not curious. For already I previsioned that with me it would be

to love, not to be loved.[35]

This statement lends significance to the theme handled in the sequence of poems entitled *A Narrow Vessel* (included in *New Poems*), which is said to be based on the poet's abortive love-affair with a girl, Maggie Brien, whom he had met at Pantasaph. The subtitle of the poem runs thus: "Being a little dramatic sequence on the aspect of primitive girl-nature towards a love beyond its capacities." The girl loved in the sequence feels sore at having thoughtlessly offered a lock of her hair to her seductive lover. She is unhappy that she has not been able to resist his advances; she hates him for having kindled the flame of love in her breast. She is apprehensive that there would be no end to the favours that may be demanded of her in future. The lover declares his passion to the girl, they kiss each other and there the whole thing ends. Soon after the girl transfers her love to another person:

> Appointed tryst defiantly she balked,
> And with her lightest comrade lightly walked,
> Who scared the childen Love to hide apart,
> And peep from some unnoticed corner of her heart.
> (p. 206.)

The lover reacts to her fickle behaviour thus :

> You gave yourself as children give, that weep
> And snatch back, with—'I meant you not to keep!'
> For that you love me. (p. 207.)

He is intrigued by this behaviour; he would have been little upset if the girl had outright rejected his love. The girl fears that nothing short of a total surrender of heart by her would compensate the love she receives. She is not prepared for this and, therefore, recoils from the lover. The epilogue to the sequence, however, characterizes the love-story as an allegory as the following lines state so clearly :

> She, that but giving part, not whole,

Took even the part back, is the Soul:
And that so disdained Lover—
Best unthought, since Love is over.
....
Out of Love's arms to make fond chain,
And, because struggle bringeth pain,
Hate Love for Love's sweet constraint,
Is the way of Souls that faint. (p. 208.)

Leaving out the epilogue, the poems included in *A Narrow Vessel* provide a human picture of love between man and woman. One among them, 'Love Declared', has particularly been praised for its "finest love poetry." It is approchable, in its excellence, by Thompson's other poem entitled 'An Arab Love Song.' The poet upheld the symbolic meaning of *A Narrow Vessel* and replied to the objection of the anonymous critic who had questioned the propriety of the epilogue:

How many have grasped the significance of my sequence, 'A Narrow Vessel'? Critics either overlooked it altogether or adverted to it as trivial and disconnected. One, who prized it, and wished I had always written as humanly, grieved that the epilogue turned it into an unreal allegory. He could not understand that all human love was to me a symbol of divine love; nay: that human love was in my eyes a piteous failure unless as an image of the supreme Love which gave meaning to its seeming. The lesson of that sequence is just this. Woman repels the great and pure love of man in proportion to its purity. This is due to an instinct which she lacks the habit and power to analyze, that the love of the pure and lofty lover is so deep, so vast in its withheld emotion, as her entire self would be unable to pay back. . . . So, with instinctive fear, she recoils from a love which her all cannot equal. Though the lover asks no more than she please to give, his love asks her very being, demands a continual upward strain. *The narrow vessel dreads to crack under the overflowing love which surges into it* (My italics) . . . . Now this is but the image and explanation of the soul's attitude towards only God.

> The one is illustrated by the other. Though God asks of the soul but to love him what it may, and is ready to give an increased love for a poor little, the soul feels that infinite love demands naturally its whole self, that if it began to love God it may not stop short of all it has to yield. It is troubled even if it did go a brief way, on the upward path; it fears and recoils from the whole great surrender, the constant effort beyond itself which is sensibily laid on it. It falls back with relieved contentment on some human love, a love on its own plane, where somewhat short of total surrender may go to requital, where no upward effort is needful. And it ends by giving for the meanest, the most unsufficing and half-hearted return, that utter self-surrender and self-effacement which is denied to God.[36]

This line of thinking corresponds to Patmore's application of the sexual analogy to the esoteric relation between the soul and God. The depiction of the female psychology in *A Narrow Vessel*, however, is different from Patmore's : in Patmore's view, the craving for union is mutual and equally strong in the two sexes and this is applicable to celestial nuptials as well. Thompson is acutely aware of human imperfection and is less optimistic about the soul's capacity to respond fully to God's love. 'Love and the Child,' reproduced below in full, gives us an accurate picture of the position in which the soul stands in relation to the Divine :

> 'Why do you so clasp me,
> And draw me to your knee?
> Forsooth, you do but chafe me,
> I pray you let me be:
> I will be loved but now and then
> When it liketh me!'
> So I heard a young child,
> A thwart child, a young child
> Rebellious against love's arms,
> Make its peevish cry.
> To the tender God I turn :—
> 'Pardon, Love most High!

For I think those arms were even Thine,
And that child was even I.' (pp. 114-15.)

Herbertian in tone in so far as the intimate relationship between God and man is concerned, the poem depicts man as the recipient of divine grace, bestowed on him out of proportion to his capacity to reciprocate God's love. Another poem of Thompson's, 'The Fair Inconstant' (mentioned in Chapter II) also makes use of a human situation to signify the inconstancy of the human soul, and its inability to recognize the Master who alone is best entitled to its love :

Dost Thou still hope Thou shalt be fair,
When no more fair to me?
Or those that by thee taken were
Hold their captivity?
....
But thou too late, too late shalt find
'Twas I that made thee fair;
Thy beauties never from thy mind
But from my loving were;
And those delights that did thee stole
Confessed the vicinage of my soul. (p. 114.)

In Thompson's love of child or devotion to woman, as revealed in the poems discussed above, we saw clear marks of an intense spirituality, displayed by saints and mystics. What is human in these poems acquires sanctity through its being constantly referred to, and linked with, divine love. Taken together, they provide the picture of an awakened soul whose craving for contact with the Divine is intensified by the experience of human love. The experience makes him invariably sad rather than ecstatic. It is a painful reminder to him of his own unworthiness : his hesitancy in responding fully to the promptings of the higher love he is aware of as a devout Catholic. This is generally the psychological condition of the mystic during the Purgative stage : drawn to the divine and yet not feeling himself adequately fitted to be the recipient of Grace. We find this condition better illustrated in

Thompson's poems more directly concerned with divine love, to which we must now pay our attention. The mysticism they represent is, on the whole, Christian in motive and inspiration though it also assumes forms akin to Nature mysticism. In its universal appeal, it shares the qualities of poetic mysticism in general : using images and symbols common to all forms of faith.

Poems of Divine Love : We begin with 'The Hound of Heaven,' unquestionably the best-known of Thompson's poems and considered by many as his master-piece. Published in *Merry England* in July 1890, it was included in *Poems* (1893). A number of editions of the poem and its translations into several languages have appeared since its first publication. It is largely this poem which has contributed to Thompson's reputation as a mystic. Evelyn Underhill calls him "the greatest mystical poet of our modern times."[37] In Caroline Spurgeon's view, "through all that he [Thompson] writes there breathes the spirit of mystic devotion and aspiration."[38] This is pre-eminently true of 'The Hound of Heaven.' Patmore has praised the poem as "one of the very few 'great' odes of which the language can boast."[39] Here is an utterance which proceeds from the depths of the poet's soul; its powerful appeal comes from the utmost sincerity behind it. A rich sequence of arresting images develop and unfold the theme handled with considerable skill. Here is an analysis of the images in the introductory passage of the poem :

> I FLED Him, down the nights and down the days;
> I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
> I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
> Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
> I hid from Him, and under running laughter,
> Up vistaed hopes I sped;
> And shot, precipitated,
> Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
> From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
> But with unhurrying chase,
> And unperturbed pace,
> Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,

They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.' (p. 77.)

The images are appropriate to the theme of 'pursuit' or, conversely, to that of 'flight.' We visualize the fugitive soul's movement through time—'the nights,' 'the days' and 'the arches of the years' forming a well-knit sequence of images, the "arches' image being particularly effective in concretizing the related concept of 'movement.' The next image, 'the labyrinthine ways', suggests the deviousness of man's thinking that leads him away from God. It ties up with the previous images suggesting movement. Another important image that follows, which is very vivid and arresting, is provided by 'Titanic glooms of chasmed fears'; it points to the psychological condition of the fugitive soul, already caught up in the 'maze' of reasoning (that weans the soul away from God). The image that is recurrent in the succeeding lines of the passage is that of 'the Feet'of God pursuing the soul. The words chosen to convey the images fall into a recognizable pattern; they are linked by their close association with the concept of 'chase' central to the poem.

The poem has been described as "a rhythmical masterpiece." The variations in rhythm and the quick succession of images give the poem a dramatic quality. The choice of the title, in reference to the role of the Deity, does not immediately strike us as happy. The word 'Hound' suggests the opposite of divine benevolence which the poem ultimately celebrates. Its appropriateness is appreciated only when we have actually gone through the whole poem : the 'fugitive' soul's dread of the "tremendous Lover" reflects a distorted perception of the true character of divinity; Love is seen as a 'Hound.' The theme of Love-chase (God's pursuit of the human soul), with which the poem deals, is an old one, familiar to students of mysticism. Devotional mystics throughout the world have viewed the relation between the soul (the seeker) and God (the object of worship) as one based on mutual love. While singing of divine love, they have often analogized this relation to the game of hide-and-seek in which the roles of the seeker and the sought

may sometimes be reversed. The Hindu mystic thus views the whole cosmic order as a *Lila* (divine sport) in which the soul's separation from God is actually a preparation for the final union. Christian mysticism conceives of the Love-chase as the necessary corollary of the principle of divine grace. Thompson's poem confirms this. Critics have tried to trace the various influences, literary and theological, that have gone into the shaping of the ode. John Thomson has, for example, very painstakingly drawn attention to many such probable sources-- St. Augustine's *Confessions*, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (in connection with the title) and *Epipsychidion*, Herbert's 'Pulley,' Vaughan's 'Retirement' and 'Pursuit.'[40] Underhill also mentions Plotinus, St. Augustine, Mechthild of Madgeburg and Eckhart as having spoken of experiences analogous to that described in 'The Hound of Heaven.'[41] Notwithstanding the literary echoes and borrowings, and howsoever old the theme, Thompson's poem remains his achievement, a record of his *personal* experience inasmuch as "the Following Love, the mystics say, is a fact of experience, not a poetic idea."[42] No other poem in the whole range of English literature, or utterance of an individual mystic, has rendered the theme of Love-chase so vivid and authentic. The poet and the mystic have collaborated here in producing a "masterpiece."

Speaking in the first person, the poet describes his flight from God, the latter chasing him with "Deliberate speed, majestic instancy." The Divine Voice warns him in a firm tone: "All things betray thee, who betrayest me." The flight is sustained through "the years"; it is of an intricate nature, persisting in the shape of a mental attitude :

> I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
> I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
> I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
> Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
> I hid from Him, and under running laughter, (p. 77.)

Till the moment of crisis is reached in the soul's struggle, its chase by the "strong Feet" of God is depicted in a sequence

of four phases. In the first phase, the fugitive seeks refuge in human sympathies. Strictly speaking, his flight is but an evasion of God, based on a fear of the overwhelming nature of divine love; in a sense, the behaviour of the fugitive is ambivalent inasmuch as he is aware, throughout the chase, of God's loving disposition towards him :[43]

> I pleaded, outlaw-wise,
> By many a hearted casement, curtained red,
> Trellised with intertwining charities;
> (For, though I knew His love Who followed,
> Yet was I sore adread
> Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside.)
> But, if one little casement parted wide,
> The gust of His approach would clash it to:
> Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue. (p. 77.)

In the next phase, the fugitive turns to regions far removed from the human sphere. Here again he finds no shelter; everything he approaches remains loyal to the Creator :

> I tempted all His servitors, but to find
> My own betrayal in their constancy,
> In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
> Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit. (p.78.)

In the third phase the fugitive turns to little children and tries to seek satisfaction in their love but fails to evoke any response in them :

> I turned me to them very wistfully;
> But just as their young eyes grew sudden fair
> With drawing answers there,
> Their angel plucked them from me by the hair. (p. 78.)

In the final phase, the fugitive gives himself upto Nature, and begins to cultivate intimacy with the natural world. But here too he finds little satisfaction. He realizes that the "poor stepdame" cannot ease his "human smart." In all these futile

efforts to evade divinity and seek satisfaction elsewhere, the fugitive meets failure after failure. Meanwhile the pursuer has been reiterating the note of admonition :

> 'Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.' (p. 78.)
> 'Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not Me.' (p. 79.)

Then comes the moment of self-examination for the fugitive. His resources are exhausted and his energies spent up; his pride is gone and he is utterly helpless. His disillusionment leads to an attitude of complete surrender to the will of God :

> Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!
> My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me.
> And smitten me to my knee;
> I am defenceless utterly. (p. 80.)

Prepared to make amends for his past follies, he goes through the mortification necessary for his regeneration. He learns humility :

> . . .grimed with smears,
> I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years—
> My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap. (p. 80.)

Taking stock of his past and dimly visualizing his future, he contemplates Death, as the final purificatory step towards his regeneration. He finds the divine Voice now at hand, "like a bursting sea." What he hears are words of gentle admonition conveying also an assurance of protective Grace :

> Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!
> Strange, piteous, futile thing!
> Wherefore should any set thee love apart?
> Seeing none but I makes much of naught' (He said),
> ....
> Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
> Save Me, save only Me?
> All which I took from thee I did but take,

Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home :
Rise, clasp My hand, and come !' (p. 81.)

We see that Thompson's poem does not actually stress renunciation of worldly things or plead for an ascetic attitude to life. It only shows the absurdity of loving the things of the world to the exclusion or neglect of God. Everything else is automatically taken care of when God is remembered as the Author of Creation. The best way to harmonize our relationship with the world is to adopt the right attitude to divinity—that of love and self-surrender. That seems to be the point of view implicit in the poem. As a record of the poet's own spiritual history, it depicts, largely, the phase of 'purgation' leading to 'illumination.'

Most of the poems under the title 'Sight and Insight,' included in *New Poems*, were written during Thompson's stay at the Capuchin Monastery, Pantasaph (1892-97). His discussions on Catholic theology with Franciscan Fathers there and the religious atmosphere of the place proved refreshing for him, both spiritually and intellectually. His intimate and fruitful friendship with Patmore also began here and lasted till the latter's death. The new inspiration provided by these influences is clearly reflected in the altered tone and quality of the 'Sight and Insight' poems which we are going to consider now. Thompson modestly acknowledged his debt to Patmore in the 'Dedication' to *New Poems*. The poems, however, also indicate a definite growth in the poet's own individual talent. They confirm a maturing of his insights as a mystic poet. Thompson had proposed several titles for the section 'Sight and Insight,' one among them being 'Mystical Poems.' Why he did not stick to the latter title is explainable : he was discreet enough to avoid the term 'mystical' for it was generally misunderstood. The present title points appropriately to the symbolism the poems employ : integrating poetic insights with an apprehension of things seen. Thompson has his eye here on the elevation attained by Patmore in *The Unknown Eros* about the poetry of

which he (Thompson) had said : "These brief notes of impression are easily and unforcedly right and there is the end of it. The thing is seen and felt; the perception and feeling are transmitted to the reader; no more, for there needs no more . . . when we see an object with clear definition under a microscope, we know the glass is by a first-rate maker. Here are things seen and I have seen them."[44] This is actually a tribute to the elder poet's ability to use symbolism effectively in the service of poetic mysticism. Thompson's Pantasaph poems approach Patmore's odes in hinting at transcendental truths and in also showing an underlying, immanental relation binding the things of the visible world. They dwell on the oscillations between pain and joy experienced by the aspirant on the Mystic Way. In them we have definite glimpses of the 'illumination' that mystical contemplation aims at and, in this respect, they do not lag much behind Patmore's odes.

The 'Sight and Insight' sequence opens with 'The Mistress of Vision'. Thompson himself described the poem as "a phantasy with no more than an illusive tinge of psychic significance." This, however, does not explain its full significance. That it seems romantic in setting and texture (in the first 9 stanzas particularly) cannot be denied.[45] But, besides the enchanting element, the poem has a substantial core of meaning. The poem is concerned with Thompson's pet theme of poetic inspiration, which is hardly distinguishable from the illumination sought by the mystic. As we have seen, Patmore too links the activities of the poet and the seer. The theme, however, dominates Thompson's poetry. In the poem under discussion, the poet's utterance attains unusual clarity and precision in Stanza XX, which consists of the lines spoken by "The Lady of fair weeping" to the seeker after transcendental truths. Forceful and prophetic in appeal (reminding us of the language of the Bible), the lines stress asceticism and Christian love as the means to the wisdom beyond human understanding :

'Pierce thy heart to find the key;
With thee take
Only what none else would keep;
Learn to dream when thou dost wake,

Learn to wake when thou dost sleep;
Learn to water joy with tears,
Learn from fears to vanquish fears,
To hope, for that thou dar'st not despair,
Exult, for that thou dar'st not grieve;
Plough thou the rock until it bear;
Know, for thou else couldst not believe;
Lose, that the lost thou mays't receive;
Die, for none other way canst live.
When earth and heaven lay down their veil,
And that apocalypse turns thee pale;
When thy seeing blindeth thee
To what thy fellow-mortals see;
When their sight to thee is sightless;
Their living, death; their light, most lightless;
Search no more—
Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region of Elenore.'
(pp. 155-56.)

The passage gives us a clear idea of the quality of the transcendental vision which is within the reach of the mystic. What he achieves, after he has gone through the necessary discipline, is a kind of new birth : the transmutation of his personality whereby he acquires a new vision and is 'deified.' Emphasis is laid on the obligatory nature of the spiritual struggle the aspirant for Grace must undergo. In 'The Hound of Heaven,' on the other hand, divine Grace was shown as operating on its own, Love being the pursuer of the soul. Stanza XXII of 'The Mistress of Vision' provides further illuminative hints about the vision attainable through the conquest of the self. It is a vision of Reality embracing what is here and now and what is beyond; the immanent and the transcendental are harmonized in it. As we shall see, Thompson's conviction here that "one unifying divine idea underlies all things,"[46] is echoed later in the poem 'In No Strange Land'. The stanza under discussion (st. XXII) is reproduced below :

'When to the new eyes of thee
All things by immortal power

Near or far,
Hiddenly
To each other linked are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star;
When thy song is shield and mirror
To the fair snake-curled Pain,
Where thou dar'st affront her terror
That on her thou may'st attain
Persean conquest; seek no more,
O seek no more!
Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore.'
(p. 156.)

The lines prefixed as a motto to 'The Mistress of Vision'.are appropriate to the underlying conception of the poem :

Wisdom is easily seen by them that love her,
and is found by them that seek her.
To think therefore upon her is perfect understanding.

WISDOM, VI.

The "Lady of fair weeping," who is "The Mistress of Vision," is herself the wisdom-symbol. Her mystic voice is 'Silence,' Wisdom beyond the 'word.' Stanza XXV towards the conclusion makes this abundantly clear :

Her tears made dulcet fretting,
Her voice had no word, (Italics mine)
More than thunder or the bird.
Yet, unforgetting,

The ravished soul her meanings knew, Mine ears heard not, and I heard. (p. 157.)

In the first stanza of the poem, the poet said : "Mine eyes saw not, and I saw," and here he says his "ears heard not" but he "heard." This is an affirmation of a vision transcending the senses, the pursuit of which is the sole concern of mystic contemplation.

'The Mistress of Vision' is followed (in the sequence) by 'Contemplation,' which is easily among Thompson's best poems, concerned with the theme of poetic creation. The poem portrays Nature in a mood which closely resembles the mystical state associated with the "Prayer of Quiet." In none of Thompson's other poems are we given as vivid an account of the poetic state (and of its affinity with quiet contemplation) as here.

The next two poems, 'By Reason of Thy Law' and 'The Dread of Height,' are inter-related thematically. They remind us of Patmore's 'Faint Yet Pursuing' and 'Victory in Defeat,' which too have a similar theme. The close affinity between 'By Reason of Thy Law' and 'Faint Yet Pursuing' is directly suggested by the kind and pattern of imagery in the two poems. All the four poems dwell essentially on the slippery nature of the spiritual path and the dangers that the aspirant has to guard himself against, at every step, before he attains the goal.[47] In "By Reason of Thy Law' the poet depicts himself as passing through a state of deprivation marked by an experience of deep anguish, in eager expectation of the spiritual dawn that follows 'the dark night.' Lying low in that state, he is yet cheered up, intermittently, by intimations of the Illuminative Way :

> In this Avernian sky,
> This sultry and incumbent canopy
> Of dull and doomed regret;
> Where on the unseen verges yet, O yet,
> At intervals,
> Trembles, and falls,
> Faint lightning of remembered transient sweet—
> Ah, far too sweet
> But to be sweet a little, a little sweet, and fleet; (p. 160.)

'The Dread of Height' reveals Thompson's awareness of the need to moderate his spiritual aspirations lest aiming at heights, he should have a miserable fall. An excessive hunger for spiritual delights is likely to breed in the aspirant a distaste for

the common duties of life. This may recoil on him, depriving him of these delights altogether and leading him to sin and ruination. Thompson voices this feeling in these lines, frankly acknowledging that the highest ranges of mysticism are still beyond his capacity :

> Too well, too well
> My flesh doth know the heart-perturbing thing;
> That dread theology alone
> Is mine,
> Most native and my own;
> And ever with victorious toil
> When I have made
> Of the deific peaks dim escalade
> My soul with anguish and recoil
> Doth like a city in an earthquake rock,
> As at my feet the abyss is cloven then,
> With deeper menace than for other men,
> Of my potential cousinship with mire; (p. 163.)

A native sense of divine immanance is evident in the 'Ode to the Setting sun,' the first important poem of length that Thompson wrote at Storrington in 1889 (when he had controlled the drug-habit). The poet informs us that it was written before he "had seen any of Mr. Patmore's work" and describes it as "not unworthy of preservation, though it was my first poem of any significance."[48] It represents his first significant attempt at an interpretation of Nature in the light of his own perceptions. For the greater part pantheistic in spirit and reflecting almost an attitude of Pagan worship, it is not without a Christian feeling. It looks forward to the 'Orient Ode,' placed next to the 'Dread of Height' in the section called 'Sight and Insight.' In the 'Orient Ode' (written at Pantasaph), the Christian feeling is stronger and more marked. The 'ode to the Setting Sun' is largely a melancholy poem. The setting sun reminds the poet of the two important inter-related mysteries of life : birth and death. Death impress es him as being holier in significance :

> Alpha and Omega, sadness and mirth,
> The springing music, and its wasting breath—
> The fairest things in life are Death and Birth,
> And of these two things the fairer thing is Death.
> Mystical twins of Time inseparable,
> The younger has the holier sway :
> It is the falling star that trails the light,
> It is the breaking wave that hath the might,
> The passing shower that rainbows maniple. (p. 83.)

Several passages, giving evidence of Thompson's classical studies at Ushaw, tell of the splendour and grandeur of the sun imagined as a god worshipped in Pagan times. The poet's knowledge of nineteenth century science is also reflected in the passages describing the sun's influence in forming beautiful things on the earth. The sun-set induces the poet to reflect pensively on pain and mortality. These lines, sounding almost Shelleyan, have a deeply personal ring in them :

> Whatso looks lovelily
> Is but the rainbow on life's weeping rain,
> Why have we longings of immortal pain,
> And all we long for mortal? Woe is me,
> And all our chants but chaplet some decay,
> As mine this vanishing,—nay, vanished Day. (p. 88.)

In the concluding passage of the ode Thompson switches back to his contemplation of the meaning of birth and death as "Mystical twins of Time." He sees them as inseparable :

> Till skies be fugitives,
> Till Time, the hidden root of change, updries,
> Are Birth and Death inseparable on earth;
> For they are twain yet one, and Death is Birth. (p. 89.)

In the 'After-Strain,' the poet's mood brightens up a little with his invocation of the mercy of "Queen Mary." Together with the reference to "That King-Maker of Creation" in the ode proper, this invocation introduces a Christian element into

what could otherwise be described as a poem of Nature-mysticism free from dogma. These lines are concerned with the joy of poetic creation, suffering being seen as inseparable from the process (as birth and death, the "Mystical twins of Time," are inseparable) :

> Oh, this Medusa-pleasure with her stings!
> This essence of all suffering, which is joy!
> I am not thankless for the spell it brings,
> Though tears must be told down for the charmed toy.
> (p. 90.)

True to his habit, Thompson has brought in his favourite theme of poetic creation, which seems appropriate in a poem devoted to 'the god of song.'

Thematically, the 'Orient Ode' is close to the ode discussed above. It is a product of careful craftsmanship; its language is comparatively simple. Patmore's influence is felt in its technical superiority over the other ode as also in its conscious use of theology. The imagery here is disciplined, more ecclesiastical than mythological. As Thompson wrote to Patmore, the poem "was suggested by certain passages in the liturgy for Holy Saturday."[49] The title refers to Christ, 'the Orient.' The poem attempts an exposition of the significance of the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection as suggested in the elaborate Catholic ritual connected with the Blessed Sacrament. The first stanza deals specially with Benediction. The poet reads a corresponding religious meaning into the whole course of the sun, from dawn to dusk, across the sky. He is at greater pains here, than in the 'Ode to the Setting Sun,' to offer an interpretation of Nature in Christian terms. Despite this, something of the Pagan attitude persists in his adoration of the sun. The central theme of the earlier ode--the immanence of God and the inter-relationship of birth and death—is handled here more purposefully, borne out by the clear progression of thought and the relative avoidance of superfluities. The sun is depicted in its complementary roles of a destroyer and a preserver. Thompson once again displays a perceptive knowledge of

contemporary science in his grasp of the significance of solar energy. Peter Butter appropriately states that the "*Orient Ode* is a hymn to the sun—as the physical sun, as an emblem of Christ and as Apollo, God of poetry."[50] The poem gives evidence of Thompson's progress in the handling of religious symbolism, though his attempt to achieve an integration of several meanings is not as successful as Patmore's is in his odes. Such lines as these echo the elder poet :

> Thou join'st the woman to the man;
> And life with Death
> In obscure nuptials moveth,
> Commingling alien yet affined breath. (p. 165.)

Again, these lines remind us of Patmore's thinking on the relation of the Church to Christ :

> Thou to thy spousal universal
> Art Husband, she thy Wife and Church;
> Who in most dusk and vidual curch,
> Her Lord being hence,
> Keeps her cold sorrows by thy hearse. (p. 168.)

Thompson truly appreciates the Pagan attitude in suggesting that it is not, essentially, incompatible with the Christian belief :

> Light out of Light!
> Resplendent and prevailing Word
> Of the Unheard!
> Not unto thee, great Image, not to thee
> Did the wise heathen bend an idle knee;
> And in an age of faith grown frore
> If I too shall adore,
> Be it accounted unto me
> A bright sciential idolatory![51] (p. 167.)

The concluding lines touch upon the immanence of Christ. The attainment of a vision of this immanence is for Thompson his

highest poetic goal :

> 'By this, O Singer, know we if thou see.
> When men shall say to thee; Lo! Christ is here,
> When men shall say to thee; Lo ! Christ is there,
> Believe them: Yea, and this—then art thou seer,
> When all thy crying clear
> Is but : Lo here! lo there!—ah me, lo everywhere!' (p. 169.)

No other poem in the section under discussion—not even 'Contemplation'—is so conspicuously concerned with Nature as 'From the Night of Forebeing.' The treatment of the theme here recalls Patmore's handling of analogous themes in such odes as 'St. Valentine's Day' and 'Winter' (taken together). Many passages faintly remind us of Wordsworth as the writes of Nature and of himself in the Immortality Ode. The poem embodies contemplations centring round the processes of death and rebirth, disintegration and reintegration that follow a cyclic course in external nature. The analogy that comes foremost to Thompson's mind is that provided by the cycle of the seasons. The mythological account of the creation of the world—of chaos shaping itself into cosmos—and the parallel Biblical account of the creation as a divine fiat, are regarded by Thompson as clues to the meaning of Death and Resurrection in the Christian sense. The poet's mood oscillates between joy and grief as he contemplates the spring scene which somehow leads him to think of the state of his own soul. He sees a cyclic movement in life : observable as much in nature as in man's physical existence. He extends the analogy to his inner spiritual self. The external spring induces him to look back to what was a happy phase of inspiration in his poetic life. His present state reminds him of the unproductiveness of winter. He anticipates his poetic resurgence, which for him would have the same significance as the second coming of Christ to the earth. The terms in which the phases of poetic life are described, and the parallels suggested between spiritual states and the changing faces of the natural world, all confirm the deeper mytical implications of the poem which it shares with several others in the section. Its Nature symbolism, lend-

ing itself to a Christian interpretation, approximates to that of the 'Orient Ode' with its "mature mysticism." As a mystical poem, 'From the Night of Forebeing' is devoted as much to 'Illumination' as to 'Purgation.' The pendulum swings here between the states of joy and grief as the poet has known them within his own soul.

The poem begins on a cheerful note with a celebration of the lovelier aspects of Nature in spring. That Thompson's response to Nature is explicitly Christian is very evident :

O Nature, never-done
Ungaped-at Pentecostal miracle,
We hear thee, each man in his proper tongue! (p. 172.)

Like Wordsworth in the Immortality Ode, the poet recollects something valuable experienced by him in the past. He is not indifferent to the festivities of the season but professes only a kind of detached participation in them :

Suffer me at your leafy feast
To sit apart, a somewhat alien guest,
And watch your mirth,
Unsharing in the liberal laugh of earth;
Yet with a sympathy
Begot of wholly sad and half-sweet memory—
The little sweetness making grief complete; (p. 172.)

Spring brings grief rather than joy to the poet's soul; it awakes in him reminiscences of a happy vision. However, the sad memory of what is gone yet assures him of its renewal :

A higher and solemn voice
I heard through your gay-hearted noise;
A solemn meaning and a stiller voice
Sounds to me from far days when I too shall rejoice,
Nor more be with your jollity at strife.
O prophecy
Of things that are, and are not, and shall be! (p. 173.)

The freshness of an illuminated vision, of the immanental type, is felt in these lines :

> In very deed,
> Washed with new fire to their irradient birth,
> Reintegrated are the heavens and earth;
> From sky to sod,
> The world's unfolded blossom smells of God.[52] (pp. 173-174.)

The language of the Bible is echoed in the following apocalyptic lines :

> And there is light!
> Light flagrant, manifest,
> Light to the zenith, light from pole to pole,
> Light from the East that waxeth to the West,
> And with its puissant goings-forth
> Encroaches on the South and the North;
> And with its great approaches does prevail
> Upon the sullen fastness of the height,
> And summoning its levied power
> Crescent and confident through the crescent hour,
> Goes down with laughters on the subject vale :
> Light flagrant, manifest,
> Light to the sentient closeness of the breast,
> Light to the secret chambers of the brain! (pp. 174-75.)

The passage in which Thompson talks of his poetic unproductiveness has lines which parallel the mystic's account of 'the dark night of the soul' :

> Winter with me, alack!
> Winter on every hand I find :
> Soul, brain, and pulses dead,
> The mind no further by the warm sense fed,
> The soul weak-stirring in the arid mind,
> More tearless-weak to flash itself abroad
> Than the earth's life beneath the frost-scorched sod.

My lips have drought, and crack,
By having music long unvisited. (p. 176.)

In the concluding lines devoted to Mary's praise, the poet looks hopefully forward to the Beatific Vision :

. . . I do hear
From the revolving year
A voice which cries :
'All dies;
Lo, how all dies! O seer,
And all things too arise :
All dies, and all is born;
But each resurgent morn, behold, more near the Perfect Morn.' (p. 180.)

Excessive imagery in noticeably avoided and simple language used in 'Any Saint'. The poem possesses as unusual clarity shared only by a few of Thompson's other poems. The conversational tone of some of its passages (wherein God is directly addressed) reflects the spirit of the religious poetry of the Metaphysicals : we are particularly reminded of Herbert's devotional lyrics. Some passages clearly echo Patmore's mysticism which sees the relation between the soul and God as nuptial. Yet Thompson's individual approach is impressed on what he has got from the elder poet. As a mystical poem, 'Any Saint' gives the reader a definite feeling of the Illuminative Way. It throughout preserves its cheerful tone. The poet writes from a sense of closeness to the Divine, anticipating the final union.[53] He has a Christian mystic's awareness of human weaknesses and limitations and sees a source of inexhaustible spiritual strength in the divine humanity of Christ. The value of the Incarnation, as a vital factor in ensuring his spiritual ascent, is fully realized by the poet :

His shoulder did I hold
Too high that I, o' erbold
Weak one,
Should lean thereon.

But He a little hath
Declined His stately path
And my
Feet set more high;
That the slack arm may reach
His shoulder, and faint speech
Stir
His unwithering hair. (pp. 180-81.)

The poet's confident dependence on God is rewarded with a sense of fulfilment; the divine is now within his grasp :

And bolder now and bolder
I lean upon that shoulder,
So dear
He is and near :
And with His aureole
The tresses of my soul
Are blent
In wished content. (p. 181.)

The following passages remind us of Patmore's language of mystical union. This is something we only occasionally come across in Thompson. Yet even here, there is an important shade of difference which distinguishes him from the "laureat of wedded love." The latter approves of "vanity" in woman, which he attributes to her being favoured and sought after by man. He sees this "vanity" as not incompatible with modesty. The bride, in his view, has a legitimate reason to be conscious of the charms which render her adorable in the eyes of the bridegroom. This position is maintained not only in *The Angel* but in the 'Psyche' poems too where the marital relation is built into a mystic symbolism. Thompson cannot forget human imperfection. He sees in the soul's humility the best guarantee of divine grace :

Yea, this too gentle Lover
Hath flattering words to move her
To pride

By His sweet side.

Ah, Love! somewhat let be —
Lest my humility
Grow weak
When Thou dost speak,

Rebate thy tender suit,
Lest to herself impute
Some worth
Thy bride of earth!

A maid too easily
Conceits herself to be
Those things
Her Lover sings;

And being straitly wooed
Believes herself the Good
And Fair
He seeks in her. (pp. 181-82.)

Thinking of man as he was made in God's image (rather than of himself with a sense of his own imperfections), Thompson writes of "the wedding of human and divine in man"[54] in a manner that both recalls and rivals Patmore's :

Man! swinging-wicket set
Between
The Unseen and Seen;
Lo, God's two worlds immense,
Of spirit and of sense,
Wed
In this narrow bed;

Yea, and the midge's hymn
Answers the seraphim
Athwart
Thy body's court! (p. 183.)

Thompson's growing consciousness and intellectual grasp of the one immanental relation linking all things, strengthened in him by his knowledge of traditional symbolism and contact with Patmore, is evident in these lines in praise of man :

Thee His great utterance bore,
O secret metaphor
Of what
Thou dream'st no jot!

Cosmic metonymy;
Weak world-unshuttering key;
One
Seal of Solomon! (p. 184.)

The renunciatory Biblical tone of the celebrated key-passage in 'The Mistress of Vision' is echoed in the later passages of the poem such as the following :

Compost of Heaven and Mire,
Slow foot and swift desire!
Lo,
To have Yes, choose No;
Gird, and Thou shalt unbind;
Seek not, and thou shalt find;
To eat,
Deny thy meat;
And thou shalt be fulfilled
With all sweet things unwilled : (pp. 184-85.)

The paradox of man as a compound of weakness and strength, which is insisted upon in the poem, is summed up thus :

Stoop, stoop; for thou dost fear
The nettle's wrathful spear,
So slight
Art thou of might!
Rise; for Heaven hath no frown
When thou to thee pluck'st down,

Strong clod !
The neck of God. (p. 186.)

The painful note that often runs through Thompson's verse is also somehow absent in 'Assumpta Maria.' A lively feeling, reflecting a "taste of spiritual summer," informs the glorification of the blessed Virgin. The poem attempts to unite the particulars of the Catholic liturgy of the Assumption with the nuptial analogy handled by Patmore, in his characteristic manner, in *The Unknown Eros* odes. The fusion is not achieved by Thompson in any significant sense. His poem does not progress much beyond devotional piety. There is not enough evidence here of mysticism rendered articulate through symbolism. The divine Motherhood of Mary is, however, depicted appropriately :

'I, the flesh-girt Paradises
Gardenered by the Adam new,
Daintied o'er with dear devices
Which He loveth, for He grew.
I, the boundless strict Savannah
Which God's leaping feet go through;
I, the Heaven whence the Manna,
Weary Israel, slid on you! (pp. 186-87.)

'Carmen Genesis' (1910) is a poetic rendering of the Biblical account of the creation of the world, a theme dealt with much more elaborately, in a related context, in 'From The Night of Forebeing.' Thompson dwells upon the closeness he sees between the poetic process and the divine act of creation. He does not talk here, as he often does, of the suffering that the poet must go through in exercising his creative powers. He confers on him a divine status and emphasizes his prophethood:

Poet! still, still thou dost rehearse,
In the great *fiat* of thy Verse,
Creation's primal plot;
And what thy Maker in the whole
Worked, little maker, in thy soul
Thou work'st, and men know not. (p. 191.)

Turning to himself, Thompson affirms his own gift of poetic insight; it enables him to view the whole natural world sacramentally :

> With beautiful importunacy
> All things plead, 'We are fair!' To me
> Thy world's a morning haunt,
> A bride whose zone no man hath slipt
> But I, with baptism still bedript
> Of the prime water's font. (p. 192.)

In Thompson's view, Pagan love had a significance of its own. It was a precursor of Christian love and pointed the way to what it spiritual and transcendental about human love. As a devout Catholic, the poet sees the most excellent example of the higher type of love in Mary's devotion to God. She embodies his vision of ideal womanhood, as may be seen in 'The After Woman.' In maturity of conception, Patmore's poems on the blessed Virgin exceed the mark attained by Thompson here or elsewhere, though the devotional strain is no less conspicuous in him. We miss Patmore's intellectual force in Thompson's lines :

> Who knows the gifts which *you* shall give,
> Daughter of the newer Eve?
> You, if my soul be augur, you
> Shall—O what shall you not, Sweet, do?
> The celestial traitress play,
> And all mankind to bliss betray;
> With sacrosanct cajoleries
> And starry treachery of your eyes,
> Tempt us back to Paradise! (p. 195.)

We discussed above most of the poems of 'Sight and Insight' in *New Poems* and saw that these poems are markedly mystical in content. We now turn our attention to a few more of Thompson's poems noted for their mystical quality. The authenticity of Thompson's mystic vision is nowhere better revealed than in 'All Flesh' and 'In No Strange Land.' That he

has made his mark here as a mystic poet is universally acknowledged. Even such critics as Cohen and Reid, who do not recognise all that the poet wrote as mystical, share this view. It must, however, be emphasized that Thompson has not suddenly stumbled upon 'illumination' here. The vision of the two poems is unmistakably present, though in varying degrees of intensity, in his earlier poems including the select ones we have considered. 'All Flesh' thus looks back to 'The Snowflake' which glorifies the divinity inherent in small things and to 'Any Saint' which measures man's smallness against his potential greatness. It upholds the spiritual basis of the universe, depicting it as informed with the divine principle from the minute "grass-blade" to the "proud sun." This is given an imaginative expression and not simply stated as an idea :

> O little blade, now vaunt
> Thee, and be arrogant!
> Tell the proud sun that he
> Sweated in shaping thee;
> Night, that she did unvest
> Her mooned and argent breast
> To suckle thee. Heaven fain
> Yearned over thee in rain,
> And with wide parent wing,
> Shadowed thee, vested thing,
> Fed thee, and slaved for thy
> Impotent tyranny. (pp. 291-92).

The vision is rendered vivid and convincing through the use of clear and simple language (as the above lines illustrate). In terms of artistic resourcefulness, Thompson's achievement here consists in shaping his means to his ends. The temper reflected in the poem is consistently cheerful : we are in the full blaze of 'illumination' and at no point does the reader feel a falling off in its intensity. Here is evidence of a perception comparable to Blake's :

> One grass-blade in its veins
> Wisdom's whole flood contains :
> Thereon my foundering mind
> Odyssean fate can find. (p. 291).

The poet sees the hand of the majestic forces of nature in the shaping of a tiny thing as a grass-blade, which, in its turn, points only to the unseen hand of God. This interdependence testifies to the divine mystery which invests all objects, great and small :

Be confident of thought,
Seeing that thou art naught;
And be thy pride thou'rt all
Delectably safe and small,
Epitomized in thee
Was the mystery
Which shakes the spheres conjoint—
God focussed to a point. (p. 292).

Conscious of his kinship with the grass-blade, the poet sees in this relation an assurance of his inherent divinity :

Unfathomably framed
Sister, I am not ashamed
Before the cherubin
To vaunt my flesh thy kin.
My one hand thine, and one
Imprisoned in God's own,
I am as God; alas,
And such a god of grass!
A little root clay-caught,
A wind, a flame, a thought,
Inestimably naught! (p. 292).

Although the poem is not without a theistic commitment, the mystical note in it is not explicitly Christian.

The illuminated vision of 'All Flesh' acquires greater authenticity in 'In No Strange Land' (1908). The latter poem, probably the last that the poet wrote, carries a sure mark of what mystics mean by the 'Unitive' experience. The definiteness of the vision expressed is matched by Thompson's linguistic resourcefulness. The confident tone of the poem leaves one in no doubt that the poet has realized the Unseen. He is now at

peace with himself and the world, sees everything as sacramental, animated by the immanent principle. The clear insights of the poem are surely the fruit of an intense spirituality of which we had the first powerful glimpse in 'The Hound of Heaven.' The vision of divinity presented in that poem was compulsive and spectacular in appeal. But it only signalled the beginning of a pursuit, not the end of it. Its wonderful rhythms and images depicted the soul as still restless, seeking to come to terms with the divinity it had dreaded. The mystical experience of which it is a record has its fruition in the calm vision of 'In No Strange Land'. It was observed about 'All Flesh' that its mysticism is religious but not overtly Christian. In 'In No Strange Land' the Christian note is unmistakable. Yet, in its first four stanzas, the spiritual realm is described in terms which accommodate, and do note come into conflict with, the immanental experience common to all forms of religious mysticism. Here is an account of divinity seen close at hand (by one whose "doors of perception" are open and no longer sealed, as applicable to those steeped in materialism) :

> O world invisible, we view thee,
> O world intangible, we touch thee,
> O world unknowable, we know thee,
> Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!
> Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
> The eagle plunge to find the air—
> That we ask of the stars in motion
> If they have rumour of thee there? (p. 293).

The connection between things immediate and remote, which the poet had asserted in 'The Mistress of Vision' (Stanza XII), is reiterated, more economically, in these suggestive lines :

> The angels keep their ancient places;—
> Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
> 'Tis ye, 'tis your enstranged faces,
> That miss the many-splendoured thing. (p. 293).

Here is the passage recalling "the ladder of the vision" to which Thompson compared Alice Meynell's soul in 'Scala Jacobi Portague Eburnea':

> But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
> Cry;—and upon thy so sore loss
> Shall shine the traffic of Jacob' ladder
> Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross. (p. 293).

The final passage, looking back to what the poet had wished for in the 'Orient Ode' (11.206-11), confirms his realization of the Incarnation:

> Yea, in the night, my soul, my daughter,
> Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
> And lo, Christ walking on the water
> Not of Gennesareth, but Thames! (p. 293.)

The small poem 'The Singer Saith of His Song' insists on the 'inward' character of poe¢tic contemplation, an activity pursued in the 'deeps' of the soul in a state of perfect solitude and tranquility. Such activity promises the vision of the "Is beyond the Seems." The penetrative insight leading to this vision is guaranteed to the seeker prepared to go through the necessary discipline that was emphasized in 'The Mistress of Vision.' Thompson draws our attention to the "unacquainted tongue" of his "Song," which corresponds to "an alien tongue, of alien things" he associates with himself as a poet in 'The Cloud's Swan Song.' All this points to his awareness of the esoteric nature of spiritual experience that the true poet shares with the mystic engaged in divine contemplation. Silence, he seems to suggest, is absorbing for either of them rather than speech.

Before making concluding observations on the mystic vision of Francis Thompson, as revealed in his poems discussed above, it is pertinent to advert again to the critical opinions on the poet based on biographical and psychological approaches. These approaches have been pushed too far by several critics in interpreting and evaluating Thompson's poetry. Reid

has been at pains to find evidence of laudanum addiction in the texture of his verse (though most of it was written during the period of the poet's withdrawal from the drug). Miss Ella Freeman Sharpe in her psychological study on the poet, draws attention to the images of maternity in his poems and suggests that the poet seeks identification with the mother-types represented by Mary and the Pagan women.[55]

Our study of Thompson's poems has shown that as a revealer of the Unseen, he invariably does not speak as one who is equally conversant with the affairs of the world. His vision has more of an other-worldly quality about it; it only conveys a child's awareness of the world of actuality. His attitude of withdrawal into his own world of spiritual perceptions may have owed something to the drug-habit, but it is a temperamental quality shared by visionary poets. The notion that in neglecting worldly things and shrinking from responsibility, the poet displayed the trait of a "decadent" is misconceived and one-sided. Thompson's lack of interest in worldly things had a positive aspect : it was rooted in his aspiration for the "Kingdom of God."

While it is true that several times Thompson speaks of his *own* experiences in terms of maternal images (as pointed out by Miss Sharpe), the psychological approach involved in the study of such images cannot invalidate the mystical quality of his poetry. This approach, it may be argued, is applicable to all types of mystical poetry, which, invariably, uses images and symbols of the kind we find in Thompson's verse. Our study of his poems has shown that not a few of them employ the motifs and manner of poetry characteristically mystical. The mystical element in them is generally universal in appeal, though Christian in tone and reference. Several poems, including 'The Hound of Heaven,' show Thompson struggling towards 'Illumination.' Poems like 'The Mistress of Vision,' 'Any Saint,' 'All Flesh,' 'The Snow Flake' and 'In No Strange Land,' leave the reader in no doubt that the poet has experienced 'Illumination.' The last of these poems gives Thompson a secure place among the poets of "the celestial vision."

NOTES

1 *Francis Thompson*, p. 217.
2 'Francis Thompson," *The Month*, 2, No. 6 (1949), pp. 394-95.
3 "The Poetry of Francis Thompson." *English Review*, 15, No.1 (1913), p. 104.
4 Aramandoo Menzes, *Airy Nothings* (Dharwar : Karnatak University, 1977), p. 27.
5 Quoted in *Religio Poetae*. See Herbert Read, "Coventry Patmore," *Essays in Literary Criticisn : Particular Studies*, p. 186.
6 Quoted in Peter Butter, *Francis Thompson*, pp. 17-18.
7 Quoted in Paul Van K. Thomson, p. 53.
8 Quoted in R.L. Megroz, *Francis Thompson : The Poet of Earth in Heaven*, p. 93.
19 R.L. Megroz, p. 164.
10 Peter Butter, p. 18.
11 Quoted in Everard Meynell, *The Life of Francis Thompson*, p. 18.
12 Quoted in Peter Butter, p. 19.
13 "The Poetry of Francis Thompson," *English Review*, 15, No. 1 (1913), p. 115.
14 R.L. Megroz, p. 183.
15 Quoted in Everard Meynell, p. 20
16 "Francis Thompson," *The Month*, 2, No. 61 (1949), p. 401.
17 Quoted in Peter Butter, p. 20.
18 Quoted in Paul Van K. Thomson, p. 92.
19 Leslie Johnston, "Modern Mysticism : Some Prophets and Poets," *Quarterly Review*, 220, No. 438 (1914), p. 237.
20 Francis Thompson, *Shelley*, pp. 28-29.
21 Quoted in Everard Meynell, p. 8.
22 Quoted in J.C. Reid, *Francis Thompson*, p. 5.
23 *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.
24 Paul Van K. Thomson, p. 105.
25 Austin Harrison, "The Poetry of Francis Thompson," *English Review*, 15, No. 1 (1913), p. 112.
26 Quoted in Everard Meynell, p. 228.
27 Paul Van K. Thomson, p. 115
28 J.M. Cohen, "Francis Thompson." *The Month*, 2, No. 6 (1949), p. 395.
29 See *Poems of Francis Thompson*, p. 339.
30 "Francis Thompson : A New Poet," *Fortnightly Review*, (1894), p. 22.
31 *Francis Thompson*, p. 82.

32 *The Life of Francis Thompson*, p. 294.

33 *Francis Thompson*, p. 111.

34 Quoted in J.M. Cohen, "Francis Thompson," *The Month*, 2, No. 6 (1949), p. 396.

35 Quoted in J.C. Reid, *Francis Thompson*, p. 19.

36 Quoted in Everard Meynell, pp. 230-32.

37 *Mysticism*, p. 135.

38 *Mysticism in English Literature*, p. 149.

39 "Francis Thompson : A New Poet," *Fortnightly Review*, (1894), p .22.

40 See John Thomson, *Francis Thompson : Poet and Mystic*, 3rd enl. ed. (London : S.M.H.K. and Co., Ltd., 1923), pp. 115-28.

41 See *Mysticism*, pp. 135-36.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

43 The ambivalence in the soul's behaviour towards Love is also evident in 'A Narrow Vessel' (read as an allegory) and 'Love and the Child,' the poems we have discussed earlier.

44 Quoted in J.C. Reid, *Francis Thompson*, pp. 139-40.

45 See *Poems of Francis Thompson*, p. 431.

46 Paul Van K. Thomson, p. 137.

47 In the *Katha Upnishad*, a well-known philosophical treatise in Sanskrit, the spiritual path leading to union with the Divine has been compared to the "razor's edge." The analogy suggests the difficulties and trials the spiritual aspirant has to undergo before he attains the goal, and the risks that the pursuit of the Divine involves. Somerset Maugham adopted the phrase as the title of one of his novels.

48 See Everard Meynell, p. 176 and Paul K. Thomson, p. 83.

49 See Everard Meynell, p. 154.

50 *Francis Thompson*, p. 28.

51 It appears that the poet did not approve of his "bright sciential idolatory" later. According to his biographer, Everard Meynell, he rejected the ode, in effect, for accommodating the Pagan view.

52 The poet's biographer, Everard Meynell, says that the last two lines (11. 104-105) are reminiscent of these lines of Herbert's 'The Flower' :

> I once more smell the dew and rain
> And relish versing.

See Everard Meynell, p. 166.

53 A somewhat similar opinion is held by Peter Butter, who maintains that the poem suggests "something of the nature of *Union*" (*Francis Thompson*, p. 20). On the other hand, Leslie Jhonston holds that the poem seems to show that Thompson "never emerged fully into the light of the 'Illuminative Way" ("Modern Mysticism: Some Prophets and Poets," *Quarterly Review*, vol. 220, 1914, p. 232). This is belied by the optimistic and reassuring tone of the poem.

54 John Freeman, p. 307.

55 See Ella Freeman Sharpe, "Francis Thompson: A Psychological Study," *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 5 (1925), pp. 329-44.

6

Language and Style

I

Patmore was a conscious craftsman and he believed that the function of art is to elevate man. He did not approve of an overt didacticism and stood for classical restraint, which is reflected in his insistence on the quality of "peace" in art. His essay on Thompson[1] indicates his distrust of romantic excess and his concern for "decorum" in the use of poetic language. However, as we shall see, this sense of restraint does not come in the way of his modulating the norms to achieve his effects. The maturer poetry in his odes confirms this. In form and structure, each of these "irregular" odes, while conforming to the traditional pattern, follows its own laws of growth as an organic whole. The flexibility achieved within the traditional forms reflects Patmore's fidelity to the creative impulse. The same flexibility is manifest in his exploitation of language : he makes an organic use of words in that he does not restrict himself to the conventions of vocabulary, syntax and grammar but moulds his medium to convey his meaning accurately. In handling his materials, he maintains a delicate balance between freedom and conformity.

Patmore's poetic practice was guided by a principle he consistently upheld, though he did not formulate it into a system. He had a clear idea of the poet's task and province : the poet should observe things around him and gain in perception from his experience of love. This idea always motivated

and guided him in composing verse; we have a confirmation of it in these lines of the Prelude entitled 'The Revelation':

> An idle poet, here and there,
> Looks round him; but for the rest,
> The world, unfathomably fair,
> Is duller than a witling's jest.
> Love wakes men, once a lifetime each;
> They lift their heavy lids, and look;
> And, lo, what one sweet page can teach,
> They read with joy, then shut the book. (pp. 105-6.)

To Patmore what is vital to poetic experience is a sensitive response to beauty and the love it evokes. However, he is concerned here with the sources of poetic inspiration rather than the actual process of poetic composition. An elaboration of his principle, bearing particularly on what is involved in poetic creation, is available in the analogy he presents in the Prelude entitled 'The Joyful Wisdom':

> They live by law, not like the fool,
> But like the bard, who freely sings
> In strictest bonds of rhyme and rule,
> And finds in them, not bonds, but wings. (p. 119.)

The poetic principle implicit here is that artistic 'freedom' and 'control' are not incompatible. This is germane to Patmore's professed view that "the language should always seem to *feel*, though not to suffer from the bonds of verse."[2] The view derives from an organic conception of language that Patmore's practice in the odes exemplifies. Avoiding both rhythmical licence and stock rhythmical patterns, he makes a skilful use of prosodic variations to convey his meaning. The best exposition of his metrical theory is given is his 'English Metrical Critics,' in the *North British Review* (1857). Reprinted under the title 'Prefatory Study on English Metrical Law' as an introduction to *Amelia*, in 1878, its title was finally changed to 'Essay on English Metrical Law.' Reviving the Anglo-Saxon principle of isochronous feet, Patmore puts

forward the challenging view that all verse-lines, irrespective of the number of syllables they contain, will take the same time to recite if the pauses (corresponding to the intervals of 'rest' in music, not to be confused with grammatical pauses) are properly observed. Departing from the practice of counting feet in terms of the syllables they contain, he counts them in terms of accents (primary and secondary) and unaccents. According to this way of scansion, the unit of measurement is the 'dipode,' a double foot consisting of four parts—a major accent, an unaccent, a minor accent and an unaccent. The metrical pauses, besides the caesura and the pause at the end of a line, may occur between words or be swallowed up in the words themselves by the latter being lengthened out. Variations within the structure of a 'dipode' may be introduced by omitting one of its elements except the major accent, which is its most essential constituent.

Patmore observes that a line in English verse can be a dimeter, a trimeter or a tetrameter, takiug the 'dipode' as a unit. Correspondingly, the line will have 8 or 12 or 16 syllables—all multiples of 4. However, in actual practice, if a line has 6 syllables, it will be a dimeter, the time equal to two syllables being taken up by the pause. Likewise, a line consisting of 10 syllables will be a trimeter, the time corresponding to two syllables being absorbed by the pause. Similarly, a line of 14 syllables will be a tetrameter, the pause being equivalent to two syllables.

Patmore's explication of the metrical principle is noteworthy for the extraordinary weightage given to the pause: measured in terms of the time absorbed by silence in the midst of sounds. In our own day, David Abercrombie has drawn attention to the same phenomenon. He talks of the pause in terms of "silent stress" which, in his opinion, is "an integral part of the structure of English verse." He observes :

> I must make an important point ; that a stress pulse can occur without sound accompanying it. . . . One must not suppose that because a silent stress is silent, it therefore does not exist for the hearer. There is a stress, even if not

> a stressed syllable; and stress is felt by the speaker (because he would do the same if he were speaking) 'empathized' by the hearer.[3]

This is a modern phonetician's confirmation of what Patmore had realized as a metrician. In manipulating the rhythm of his lines in the odes, Patmore exploited the pause with a telling effect (as will be shown hereinafter). C.C. Abbott observes that "the basis of 'sprung rhythm' and Patmore's theory of pause and stress are one in essence."[4] A.C. Partridge remarks about Hopkins that he "writes what Patmore characterized as dipodic verse, resembling the strongly stressed metre of *Piers Plowman* in which the unit of rhythm covers two adjacent feet."[5] D.S. Mac Coll, in his comparative estimate of Patmore and Hopkins as prosodists, acknowledges Patmore's sound mastery of the metrical principle and is critical of Hopkins, metrical theory and practice.[6] Whether it was Patmore or Hopkins who was more original in his theory may be difficult to decide, the fact remains that both deviated from the contemporary practice of metre and looked back to the Anglo-Saxon poets for the confirmation of their metrical principles.

Patmore's metrical theory, in sum, is traceable essentially to his recognition of the temporal basis of rhythm. Metre is seem by him as consisting of isochronous intervals (composed of both sounds and silences) between 'beats' or 'ictuses,' the pauses (metrical and grammatical) constituting an integral part of the structure. Further, both rhyme and alliteration in his view are essential to verse and not mere ornaments, the one marking metrical pauses and the other stresses. Rhyme contributes emphasis to the word rhymed, repetition of sound being an aid to memory rather than a source of sensuous pleasure. Hopkins' metrical theory and practice are suggestively similar to Patmore's. He too looked upon isochronous intervals between stresses as the basis of metre and considered the pauses in a verse-line integral to its metrical structure. With Patmore again, he thought of the poem as an organic whole, all its parts (vocabulary, syntax and sound-pattern) contributing to

its meaning.

Patmore confined his metrical choice as a poet to the measures he used in *The Angle, The Victories of Love* and *The Unknown Eros.* He did not experiment with difficult forms; the sonnet and blank verse, for example, he avoided. The restriction he imposed on himself could be explained in terms of the suitability of the metres chosen to the specific kind of experience his verse is concerned with : mystical love comprehending both human and divine love. The relative simplicity of the measure used in *The Angel* and its sequel is compensated for by the variations introduced thereon. This enables the poet to make his rhythm correspond to the fluctuations of the human soul as it goes through the adventure of love. The octosyllabic verse adopted for *The Angel* is smooth, regular and swift, aptly described by Patmore himself as "a measure particularly recommended by the early critics . . . chosen by poets in all times for erotic poetry, on account of its joyous air."[7] The quality attributed to the octosyllabic verse can be perceived in the long poem wheresoever we pick out lines. The absence of metrical pauses, even at the terminations of lines, also contributes to the rapid movement of the lines. These lines would serve for illustration :

> Her soft voice, singularly heard
> Beside me, in her chant, withstood
> The roar of voices, like a bird
> Sole warbling in a windy wood;
> And, when we knelt, she seem'd to be
> An angel teaching me to pray; (p. 122.)

The rapidity of movement that we notice here results from the reduced number of stresses, being, on the average, less than 4 per line, 4 being the number demanded by the basic metrical pattern chosen. Stressed syllables are seen only occasionally coming together. Thus in the line "The rcar of vioces, like a bird," the three words "roar," "voices" and "bird" carry stress, whereas the metre demands 4 stresses. Since we have only three stresses in the line, and adjacent syllables are not

stressed, there its a corresponding gain in terms of quickness of movement. Let us look at another sample :

> Attack'd mine eyes. By pale and park
> I rode, and ever seem'd to see,
> In the transparent starry dark,
> That splendid brow of chastity,
> That soft and yet subduing light,
> At which, as at the sudden moon,
> I held my breath, and thought 'how bright!'
> That guileless beauty in its noon,
> Compelling tribute of desires
> Ardent as day when Sirius reigns,
> Pure as the permeating fires
> That smoulder in the opal's veins. (p. 158.)

The sensuous element in this verse (as elsewhere in the poem) is matched by the spiritual quality—an effect traceable to the regularity of the measure used. In their rapid movement, the lines capture the tempo of emotions usually associated with the experience of love, marked by excitement during the phase of courtship. However, the emotions expressed in the poem are, at the same time, not violent. This impression is reinforced by the metrical form of the lines, having a consistently regular pattern. In the midst of regularity, Patmore introduces variations on the metre to avoid monotony, and to reproduce the fluctuations of the soul :

> His merits in her presence grow
> To match the promise in her eyes,
> And round her happy footsteps blow,
> The authentic airs of Paradise. (p. 77.)

The last line of the stanza has 9 instead of the usual 8 syllables, and the distribution of stress does not strictly correspond to the iambic measure. The variation serves the poet's purpose, which is to focus attention on the *divinizing* power of love suggested by the paradisal *motif* introduced in the

last line.

The switch from the octosyllabic quatrain of *The Angel* to the octosyllabic couplet used in *The Victories* must have been necessitated by the changed narrative mode, the epistolary form into which the latter poem is cast (demanding lesser metrical restrictions than imposed by the quatrain). In either case, the metre is marked by simplicitly and regularity, accompanied by variety of the type we noticed in the stanza considered above. These features, together with the rapid movement of the lines, ensure the "joyous air" Patmore thought so essential to his erotic verse.

By and large, the diction of *The Angel* is simple and straightforward, drawn from language in everyday use. This must have been an important factor responsible for the poem's immediate popularity. The simple diction matches the poet's intimate knowledge of the erotic experience he is talking about. Here is a stanza written in simple and clear language :

> The moods of love are like the wind,
> And none knows whence or why they rise :
> I ne'er before felt heart and mind
> So much affected through mine eyes. (p. 108.)

Patmore, however, did not restrict his usage to the vocabulary of the kind the above stanza exemplifies. In his search for an appropriate idiom for his theme, he did not ignore the poetic tradition (though he drew largely on simple and direct language). Reid, drawing attention to the occurrence in *The Angel* of such adjectives as "sweet," "light," "bright," etc., and nouns such as "joy," "grace," "pride," seems to overlook this fact when he says that the diction is not "sufficiently purified of conventional epithets."[8] Actually, the words carrying poetical association are meant to give the language the elevation that is traditionally associated with erotic verse. Both in *The Angel* and its sequel, even when the words chosen are obviously poetic, they add to the meaning and do not give rise to any vagueness or diffuseness. Thus several words in the following lines, such as "sweet," "gay," "halo," and "bright,"

which we could label 'poetic,' are by no means vague but quite appropriate in their contexts :

> How sweet a tongue the music had !
> 'Beautiful Girl,' it seem'd to say,
> 'Though all the world were vile and sad,
> 'Dance on; let innocence be gay'.
> Ah, none but I discern'd her looks,
> When in the throng she pass'd me by,
> For love is like a ghost, and brooks
> Only the chosen seer's eye;
> And who but she could e'er divine
> The halo and the happy trance,
> When her bright arm reposed on mine,
> In all the pauses of the dance! (p. 157).

Recapitulating the thrilling experience of a coveted dance with his beloved, the lover can't help letting his fantasy colour the various details of the experience. With his worshipful attitude towards love, it is only natural that he should give an account of the dance in 'poetic' terms connected with the sacred. That is what leads Patmore, understandably, to the choice of the words listed above. No other word than "halo," for example, would exactly suggest the divine significance the poet attached to the womanly form (as perceived by the devoted lover). The other words mentioned ("gay," "bright," etc.,) cohere with "halo" and have a similar significance.

Patmore's lexical choices in the two poems confirm his regard for "decorum" and distrust of novelty for its own sake. He draws upon words of every day use and on a relatively small proportion of the poet's conventional vocabulary. This enables him to render faithfully the delights of wedded love against the background of concrete facts and situations. Words with poetical association, as chosen by him, are invariably appropriate to the celebration of love in spriritual terms and those from ordinary language lend an air of familiarity to the experience of love described. The stanza from *The Angel*, cited below, illustrates the point :

> How changed! In shape no slender Grace,
> But Venus; milder than the dove;
> Her mother's air; her Norman face;
> Her large sweet eyes, clear lakes of love. (p. 68).

Economy in description is achieved here through the choice of suitable words noted for their concreteness or for their poetical association. The choice of the poetical word "Venus" is rendered effective through the use of the epithet "Norman face," associated with the physical form of the lady who is being described. We notice here an interplay of the vaguely associative ("Venus") and the concretely suggestive ("Norman face") that enables the poet to divinize love and also celebrate it in familiar terms. The syntax plays its part too. We have a sequence of Noun Phrases constituting a part of the first line and the rest of the stanza (e.g. "slender Grace," "Venus," "the dove," "Her mother's air," "her Norman face," etc.). The choice of this sequence makes for economy. It provides an instance of parallel syntax too. The iterative similarly structured phrases, occurring in the last two lines, increase the cohesion and regularity of the verse. Thus we have a sequence of images (presented by the phrases) and the effect is an impression of coherence and clarity of outline about the descriptive sketch.

Patmore's command of concrete detail, based on direct and close observation, may also be seen in the following lines. (Plain words are employed in achieving an accurate description; there is no trace of decorativeness in the language) :

> Watch how a bird, that captived sings,
> The cage set open, first looks out,
> Yet fears the freedom of his wings,
> And now withdraws, and flits about,
> And now looks forth again; until,
> Grown bold, he hops on stool and chair,
> And now attaids the window-sill,
> And now confides himself to air. (p. 146).

The diction is simple and clear, appropriate to what is described. No word is superfluous or drawn from the poet's

conventional vocabulary. Most of the nouns ("cage," "wings," "stool," "chair," "window-sill") are concrete; the verbs "withdraws," "flits" and "hops" are most suitable to describe the movements of the bird (suddenly released from captivity).

The following is an instance of "current language heightened" (the phrase Hopkins applied to poetic language) through the infusion of lexical items Biblical in association; the language approximates to the sacred :

> And therefore in herself she stands
> Adorn'd with undeficient grace,
> Her happy virtues taking hands,
> Each smiling in another's face,
> So, dancing round the Tree of Life,
> They make an Eden in her breast,
> While his, disjointed and at strife,
> Proud-thoughted, do not bring him rest. (p. 90).

We come across here two unusual forms—the attribute word "undeficient" and the compound "Proud-thoughted." The word "Eden" and the epithet "Tree of Life" have paradisal association. In combination, these expressions heighten the quality of the language. This helps to exalt the theme of love and correspondingly the stature of the lady whose virtues are being described.

Patmore, as stated earlier, usually sticks to the norms of language and does not conspicuously violate them. This is specially true of his practice in the two poems on wedded love, *The Angel* and its sequence. However, we find many instances in these poems, more particularly in the Preludes of *The Angel*, of his using simple words in such a way as to yield complex meanings. The complexity arises from the unusual contexts in which ordinary words are placed. This effect is further intensified through the poet's use of paradox and anti-thesis. A deft handling of this device enables the poet to suggest the depth and subtlety of his meaning :

> Ah, wasteful woman, she who may
> On her sweet self set her own price,
> Knowing man cannot choose but pay, ..

> How has she cheapen'd paradise;
> How given for naught her priceless gift,
> How spoil'd the bread and spill'd the wine,
> Which spent with due, respective thrift,
> Had made brutes men, and men divine. (p. 79).

The seemingly odd juxtaposition of "wasteful" and "woman" (which do not normally collocate) is suggestive of the underlying meaning : a view of woman stressing her superiority over man. The familiar figure of a commercial transaction (reminding the reader of its frequent use in Herbert's poems) is sustained throughout the short lyric to emphasize this point. The Biblical images of 'bread' and 'wine' provide the spiritual context appropriate to the theme here.

Patmore's handling of the conceit, reflecting the oblique manner of the Metaphysicals, gains in effect occasionally through the use of an unfamiliar word. The word "usufruct," Latin in origin and drawn from the legal 'register,' adds point to the conceit in these lines :

> Nay, could eternal life afford
> That tyranny should thus deduct
> From this fair land, which call'd me lord,
> A year of the sweet usufruct ? (p. 153).

The lover claims "eternal" lordship over his beloved—"this fair land." The prospect of a year's delay in getting united with her permanently is very painful for him to contemplate. This feeling is conveyed adequately through the conceit and rendered particularly explicit by the word "usufruct."

The syntax of the two long poems, *The Angel* and *The Victories*, (constituting the bulk of what Patmore wrote before his conversion to Catholicism) is generally unobtrusive, and, therefore, of a piece with the diction. As a rule, Patmore does not violate the norms of syntax. He stays within the accepted forms, achieving his effects through subtle modulation of the norms where necessary. The periods tend to occur at the ends of lines, often at the ends of the quatrains as far as *The Angel* is concerned. The phrasal and clausal divisions are also seen

to mark the terminations of lines. The following stanzas are cited as examples :

> How easy to keep free from sin !
> How hard that freedom to recall!
> For dreadful truth it is that men
> Forget the heavens from which they fall.
> Lest sacred love your soul ensnare,
> With pious fancy still infer
> 'How loving and how lovely fair
> 'Must He be who has fashion'd her !' (p. 126.)

Beyond inversions of the word order, we do not notice any conspicuous dislocations of syntax in the two poems. The verbs "recall" and "ensnare" in the above verse have been shifted to the end positions and receive additional emphasis through rhyme. Such modulations, accommodated within the metrical structure, only help to convey the nuances of meaning. Thus the word "ensnare" is deliberately given emphasis in order to drive home to us how the physical graces of the beloved could enslave the lover if he forgot Him who shaped her into loveliness.

Here and there in *The Angel* and its sequel, we find the phrasal and clausal divisions occurring medially too, the syntax still remaining straightforward and by no means unusual or intricate :

> I loiter'd through the vacant house,
> Soon to be hers; in one room stay'd,
> Of old my mother's. Here my vows
> Of endless thanks were oftenest paid. (p. 168.)

When Patmore is presenting arguments and analogies (in a manner reminiscent of the Metaphysicals), and not seeking an effect of the kind achieved through parallel syntax, he resorts to subordination and other forms of elaboration (such as modification, co-ordination, etc.), the syntax assuming an analytical form as in the following lyric :

> When'er I come where ladies are,
> How sad soever I was before,

Though like a ship frost-bound and far
Withheld in ice from the ocean's roar,
Third-winter'd in that dreadful dock,
With stiffen'd cordage, sails decay'd,
And crew that care for calm and shock
Alike, too dull to be dismay'd,
Yet, if I come where ladies are,
How sad soever I was before,
Then is my sadness banish'd far,
And I am like that ship no more;
Or like the ship if the ice-field splits,
Burst by the sudden polar Spring,
And all thank God with their warming wits,
And kiss each other and dance and sing,
And hoist fresh sails, that make the breeze
Blow them along the liquid sea,
Out of the North, where life did freeze,
Into that heaven where they would be. (p. 72.)

The elaborate and analytical form of syntax in the above verse accords well with the essential *complexity* of the argument presented. The complexity consists in the twists and turns of thought underlying the analogy, introduced to highlight the erotic experience : the state of joy to which the lover is elevated in the company of the woman loved.

On the whole, as these specimens of verse illustrate, Patmore's handling of syntax in *The Angel* and *The Victories* does not involve any remarkable deviations from the established poetic norms. However, as observed earlier, he exploits possibilities and choices within the accepted forms and modulates the norms to the extent desirable. Such modulations are met with occasionally, as here in the Prelude entitled 'A Riddle Solved' :

Kind souls, you wonder why, love you,
When you, you wonder why, love none.
We love, Fool, for the good we do,
Not that which unto us is done ! (p. 97.)

It is the interposition of an elliptical sentence, the parenthetical "you wonder why" in each of the first two lines of the stanza, giving the lines a conversational tone, that is rather striking here. The parenthetical item "Fool" in the third line ties up with the elliptical construction mentioned above. In the last line, we would normally expect the preposition 'for' after "Not"; this is evidently deleted. The tone of the verse is characteristically conversational and argumentative; the manner is oblique. The "riddle" presented (and "solved") is emphasized through the syntactic structure.

Patmore's handling of language in the two poems shows that he is capable of achieving flexibility within the forms chosen by him. The three aspects of the linguistic structure of the poems—metre, diction and syntax—on the whole cohere in terms of the general simplicity they share.

Some observations were made, in the beginning of this chapter, on Patmore's metrical theory and his use of language in *The Unknown Eros* odes. Having discussed specifically the language of *The Angel* and its sequel, we turn now to the metrical form and language of the odes. In the odes, as stated earlier, Patmore puts the principle enunciated by him in his 'Essay on English Metrical Law' into actual practice. Instead of the regular octosyllabic measure of his earlier verse, he used a metre that suited the sublimer themes of the odes. The metre is catalectic, each line a tetrameter of 16 syllables, and the catalexis allowed varies from 2 to 14 syllables per line. The lines, measured in terms of syllables, are of varying length, but if the pauses are taken into account, and not ignored in vocalization, Patmore's point in saying that his lines are no longer "irregular" may be appreciated. Each Patmorean ode (with the exception of 'The Child's Purchase' which displays some kind of a stanzaic division, the stanzas being of varying length) is a continuous piece, the number of lines varying from poem to poem. No definite pattern is seen in the distribution of rhymes. Together with this, the apparently irregular lines of the odes and the flexibility noticeable in the distribution of stress seem to have prompted the observation that Patmore "was the fore-runner of modern free verse."[9] His lines, however, have a poise about them that we normally would not

associate with free verse. The freedom he allows himself in the odes is restricted to the variations within an over-all pattern. The stateliness of the Patmorean ode has a distinctiveness of its own. It can only be attributed to the poet's individual talent, drawing strength from his fidelity to experience. His choice of the form was no doubt influenced by the earlier models provided by the odes of Wordsworth, Milton, Crashaw, etc. Thompson's estimate of the metre of Patmore's odes as "majestic, flexible and beautiful in a high degree, answering the feeling like the pulses of the blood"[10] is quite appropriate and sound. Edward Dowden's observation too is based on an accurate perception of the metrical quality of the odes :

> Every syllable has been duly poised, and there is a sweet retarding movement in the lines which invites the reader to set down in his consciousness the weight of syllables to the least and lightest.[11]

As an illustrative example, let us examine 'The Child's Purchase' to show the suitability of the catalectic metre to its theme. Here the poet dwells on the unutterability that seizes him as he contemplates on the blessed Virgin. This inevitable "invasion of silence" is suggested effectively by the silences in the lines :

> Ah, Lady elect,
> Whom the Time's scorn has saved from its respect,
> Would I had art
> For uttering this which sings within my heart!
> But, lo,
> Thee to admire is all the art I know.
> My mother and God's; Fountain of miracle !
> Give me thereby some praise of thee to tell
> In such a a Song
> As may my Guide severe and glad not wrong
> Who never spake till thou'dst on him conferr'd
> The right, convincing word ! (pp. 438-39).

The lines vary in length (measured in terms of syllables), the

number of syllables ranging from 2 to 11 a line. The line 'But, lo,' consisting only of two syllables, it filled with the maximum silence possible, the pause at the end being very long drawn. The observing of the long silence is made inevitable further by the long lines immediately preceding and following :

(i) For uttering this which sings within my heart;
(ii) Thee to admire is all the art I know.

The extreme brevity of the line under discussion signals a break-down of linguistic communication, suggestive of something too deeply felt, defying expression. The silence intervening between the poet's ineffective attempts at affirmative statements gains in significance from the contexts provided by these statements (as the one contained in "But lo," expressing wonder). The Latin prayer *Ora pro me*! repeated at intervals in the poem lends it a ritualistic character. The priest officiating at a ritual performs gestures and utters words which have an esoteric meaning. That is what Patmore seems to be doing here. His 'silences' correspond to gestures and his affirmations (as the language used throughout the poem shows) consists of words which suggest far more than they state. To have an idea of the digni-fied language of the religious odes (distinguishable as such from the language of *The Angel* and its sequel), we may take a look at these lines of the same poem :

Key-note and stop
Of the thunder-going chorus of sky-Powers;
Essential drop
Distill'd from worlds of sweetest-savour'd flowers
To anoint with nuptial praise
The Head which for thy Beauty doff'd its rays,
And thee, in His exceeding glad descending, meant,
And Man's new days
Made of His deed the adorning accident !
Vast Nothingness of Self, fair female Twin
Of Fulness, sucking all God's glory in !
(Ah, Mistress mine,
To nothing I have added only sin,

And yet would shine !)
Ora pro me! (pp. 439-40.)

The choice of the select vocabulary items "Key-note," "stop," "chorus," "essential," "anoint," "nuptial," "adorning," "glory" is appropriate to the sacredness of the theme, majority of the items acquiring significance from their poetic and religious association. The two words "Key-note" and "stop" introduce a musical analogy conveying a complex of meaning. A sequence of closely-knit images is presented in the shape of Noun Phrases followed by modifiers (Prep. Phrases containing Noun Phrases, which in their turn may involve a repetition of the 'Prep. + NP' pattern e.g. "Key-note and stop/Of the thunder-going chorus of sky-Powers.)"[12] The language gains in elevation, at places, through syntactic elaboration as well. This is seen, for example, in the opening lines of the poem, which present complexity and a reasonably high degree of elaboration in their syntax :

> As a young Child, whose Mother, for a jest,
> To his own use a golden coin flings down,
> Devises blythe how he may spend it best,
> Or on a horse, a bride-cake, or a crown,
> Till, wearied with his quest,
> Not liking altogether that nor this,
> He gives it back for nothing but a kiss,
> Endow'd so I
> With golden speech, my choice of toys to buy,
> And scanning power and pleasure and renown,
> Till each in turn, with looking at, looks vain,
> For her mouth's bliss,
> To her who gave it give I it again. (p. 438.)

Studied from various levels of structure, including metre, 'The Child's Purchase' shows Patmore at his best as a writer of accomplished verse. The catalectic metre especially, handled very skilfully, accords so well with the exalted religious emotions and feelings the poet seeks to express.

As far as the diction of the odes is concerned, it is not

strikingly different from that of the earlier poems, *The Angel* and *The Victories*. Essentially simple, it acquires additional features (such as the elevation that we noticed in the diction of 'The Child's Purchase') through words mystical or sacred in association as also through a skilful blending of abstract and concrete words. Already in *The Angel*, as stated earlier, we perceive a stylistic distinction between the Preludes and the Idylls. The Preludes have a good proportion of abstract words and the style leans towards the Metaphysical in terms of wit and paradox. In the odes, the diction gains in dignity and suggestion through the infusion of words related to the sacred. In the religious odes (Bk II of *The Unknown Eros*), we notice Latinisms and words distinguishably 'poetic,' and also archaic words. In 'The Child's Purchase,' discussed earlier, apart from the line *Ora pro me*!, several such words as "thy" and "albeit" are noticeable. Several odes have titles in Latin and in one such ode entitled 'Deliciae Sapientiae De Amori' we come across the Latin interpolation *cor meum et caro mea*. The odes collectively show Patmore in greater command of language, forcing it into his meaning as the creative impulse demands. The use of long and unusual words such as "disemparadised," or the six-syllabled epithet "long-procrastinating" in 'The Child's Purchase' again and the greater proportion of compounds—"King-caressed," "Kindcouched," "custom-killing," "ne'ver slumbering," "clayconceived"—in the Psyche odes, should give us an idea of the extension in the poet's vocabulary. It is decidedly a progression towards an elevated idiom suited to the religious themes. The use of a compound like "clay-conceived" is evidently creative; it enables the poet to express his meaning plainly and economically. As mentioned earlier, the essential simplicity of diction that marks the poetry of *The Angel* and its sequel, however, continues to be there in the odes too. Even among the solemn parts of *The Unknown Eros* (where elaborate diction would not be out of place), we spot lines and passages involving a markedly simple diction. The simple words chosen are used in such a skilful way that the language acquires dignity and richness of meaning. The introductory lines of the ode entitled 'Departure' provide an illustration of verse movingly simple and solemn at once :

It was not like your great and gracious way!
Do you, that have nought other to lament,
Never, my Love, repent
Of how, that July afternoon,
You went,
With sudden, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
Upon your journey of so many days,
Without a single kiss, or a good-bye? (pp. 362-63.)

The recollection of the passing away of a dear one arouses deep and intense emotions in the widower. The simple diction here, in combination with the catalectic metre, providing scope for pauses of varying length, serves as the best medium for conveying both the depth and intensity of these emotions. The tone of the verse gains in solemnity too, an effect largely to be attributed to the vocabulary used : select in its exact relevance to the theme. Choice phrases such as "unintelligible phrase," "frighten'd eye," "your journey," "a single kiss," "a good-bye," appeal to us greatly because they are suggestively simple and, at the same time, appropriate to the situation.

The language of the odes also impresses us by its compactness. This is somehow linked with their metrical structure too, which imposes its own constraints on the syntax: permitting short catalectic lines in the midst of long lines. Thus, while the disposition of clauses in the odes does not vary in any significant sense from what we find in the earlier verse, the odes sometimes reveal a higher degree of elaboration in the syntax and an increased proportion of tighter clauses or phrases in the shape of the short catalectic lines (which may not necessarily constitute full units of syntactic structure by themselves). The last nine of the following lines from the Proem to Bk I of *The Unknown Eros* exemplify syntactic elaboration :

Pierce, then, with thought's steel probe, the trodden ground,
Till passion's buried floods be found;
Intend thine eye
Into the dim and undiscover'd sky
Whose lustres are the pulsings of the heart,

And promptly, as thy trade is, watch to chart
The lonely suns, the mystic hazes and throng'd sparkles
  bright
That, named and number'd right
In sweet, transpicuous words, shall glow alway
With Love's three-stranded ray,
Red wrath, compassion golden and lazuline delight.'
(p. 347.)

Barring the first two lines, the above verse is a long complex-compound sentence consisting of several clauses and phrases. The elaborate syntax, conspicuous here by its long-windedness, reinforces the idea implicit in the theme—the perplexity associated with the pursuit of a mysterious and transcendent wisdom. We also notice a preponderance of plosives of which the occurrence of the heavy sound /d/ is specially marked. This introduces an element that works a subtle evocative effect through suggestion: the consonantal sounds here, cumulatively, give us an increased feeling of the arduous nature of the struggle the soul is commissioned to undergo in this verse. The vocabulary used in the passage is largely concrete. In the last line, the three nouns "wrath," "compassion" and "delight" are abstract, but the adjectives modifying them, "red," "golden" and "lazuline," are concrete. It shows Patmore's ability to achieve the kind of fusion we come across in the language of the Metaphysicals. The passage provides a good illustration of how he achieves complex effects through his handling of syntax, sound-pattern and vocabulary. It is the interplay of these three aspects of verbal structure that essentially contributes to the richness and complexity characteristic of the superior poetry of Patmore's odes.

The poem 'Beta,' reproduced below, provides a striking instance of elaborate syntax :

Of infinite Heaven the rays,
Piercing some eyelet in our cavern black,
Ended their viewless track
On thee to smite
Solely, as on a diamond stalactite,

And in mid-darkness lit a rainbow's blaze,
Wherein the absolute Reason, Power and Love,
That erst could move
Mainly in me but toil and weariness,
Renounced their deadening might,
Renounced their undistinguishable stress
Of withering white,
And did with gladdest hues my spirit caress,
Nothing of Heaven in thee showing infinite,
Save the delight. (p. 356.)

This poem is a long sentence, consisting of a chain of clausal and phrasal structures. Elaborate syntax of this sort accounts largely for the majestic movement and heightened tone of the verse. It is in perfect accord with the quality of the experience dwelt upon: a gradual unfolding of the meaning and mystery of the Incarnation. The formless Infinite, inscrutable, likened to "withering white," holds no attraction for the poet. The "gladdest hues" arising from the dispersion of white light (into its component colours), are suggestive of the Absolute manifested as the embodied One: The Uncreate Light rendered palpable.

The tone of these lines of 'Tired Memory' is both intimate and lofty, a quality arising from the syntactic pattern as also the diction :

The stony rock of death's insensibility
Well'd yet awhile with honey of thy love
And then was dry;
Nor could thy picture, nor thine empty glove,
Nor all thy kind, long letters nor the band
Which really spann'd
Thy body chaste and warm,
Thenceforward move
Upon the stony rock their wearied charm. (p. 366.)

(i) In the first two lines we notice the following structures :

Line	*Noun phrase*	*Modifier* (*Prep. Phrase*)
1	The stony rock	of death's insensibility
2	honey	of thy love

We find here syntactic equivalence between the Noun Phrases inasmuch as each is modified by a Prep. Phrase having the same preposition "of" as its initial element. An effect of coherence results from the occurrence of two similar Prep. Phrases acting as the modifiers.

(ii) In lines 4 and 5, there are three parallel conjunctive constructions beginning with the function word "nor," each enclosing a Noun Phrase beginning with the pronoun "thy" or "thine." The tone gains in elevation through the syntax involving a repetitive use of similar conjunctive constructions as shown. The repetition of the pronoun "thy," not only in lines 4-5 (as indicated) but throughout the verse here, emphasizes the intimate nature of the poet's relationship with the dead wife. This lends further poignancy to the poem's elegiac quality.

(iii) A Noun Phrase of the type mentioned above, beginning with "thy" ("thy body chaste and warm"), occurs in line 7. The adjectival construction "chaste and warm" is shifted from the pre-Head to the post-Head position, which is an instance of inversion. Evidently, the adjectives thus shifted acquire emphasis.

(iv) Line 9 contains two Noun Phrases—one of which, "stony rock," occurs earlier in line 1. The repetition obviously is meant for emphasis.

The diction is select and simple. The phrase "stony rock" aptly ties up with, and images forth, the meaning of the expression "death's insensibility." For "awhile," the death of the beloved does not compel the lover's acceptance of it as a stark fact. He can still recall the experience of love in its full intensity, suggested by the expression "welled": the paradoxical streaming forth of "Love" from a "stony rock." The word

"honey," in this context, conveys best the emotions and sensations—the sweet recollections—associated with "love." The tokens cherished by the surviving husband—the beloved wife's "picture," "empty glove," "long letters," and "band"—are very familiar and simple as lexical choices. Associated together here, they serve to heighten the elegiac effect.

The syntactic features of another ode, "Sponsa Dei," similarly merit special study. They help to create an atmosphere of mystery about the "Maiden Fair" representing the soul as the spouse of God. A close look at the poem shows the recurrence throughout of four types of constructions :

(i) 'Wh' constructions as questions, beginning with 'What' and 'Who,'
(ii) 'Wh' constructions as exclamatory sentences, beginning with 'What' and 'how,'
(iii) 'Wh' constructions as relative clauses (embedded sentences), beginning with 'who,' 'which' and 'whom,' and
(iv) Conditional clauses beginning with 'if.'

There is, however, one line which does not conform to the general pattern into which the questions are cast; it conjoins two 'Yes/No' type questions:

Are all, then, mad, or is it prophecy?

The demonstrative "this" in the first line "What is this Maiden Fair" recurs twice in the subsequent lines, first in the line "Who is this Fair" (line 22) and later in the line "What if this Lady by thy soul, and He/" (line 45). All these grammatical devices, consisting in the repetition of similar or identical constructions, have an evocative effect, giving rise to something in the nature of an epiphany: a vision of the soul seen suddenly in its relation to the Divine.[13] The semantic structure of the verse derives support from the syntactic pattern indicated; the effect is that the poem is charged with religious significance of a high order.

In many "Widower's Odes," which commemorate Patmore's love for his first wife, we are struck by an important quality:

the technical accomplishment matches the intensity and sacredness of the emotions expressed. This would be evident from an examination of 'A Farewell,' chosen as an illustrative example :

With all my will, but much against my heart,
We two now depart.
My very Dear,
Our solace is, the sad road lies so clear.
It needs no art,
With faint, averted feet
And many a tear,
In our opposed paths to persevere.
Go thou to East, I West.
We will not say
There's any hope, it is so far away.
But, O, my Best,
When the one darling of our widowhead,
The nursling Grief,
Is dead,
And no dews blur our eyes
To see the peach-bloom come in Evening skies,
Perchance we may,
Where now this night is day,
And even through faith of still averted feet
Making full circle of our banishment,
Amazed meet;
The bitter journey to the bourne so sweet
Seasoning the termless feast of our content
With tears of recognition never dry. (pp. 377-78.)

The technical skill is specially evident from the choices made by the poet at the levels of syntax and vocabulary; the choices are appropriate to the dignity of the theme. The following constructions, each consisting of a Noun modified by a Prep. Phrase, fall into a pattern, providing an example of parallel syntax :

(i) darling of our widowhead (in line 13).
(ii) faith of still averted feet (in line 20),

(iii) circle of our banishment (in line 21), and
(iv) tears of recognition never dry (in line 25).

The repetitive syntax reveals a process of thought, a lingering on the implications of the statements made. This lends a characteristically meditative and elegiac tone to the verse, recalling the ritual language of the Bible. The following lines provide another example of parallel syntax (repetition of participle phrases):

(i) Making full circle of our banishment (line 21)
(ii) Seasoning the termless feast of our content (line 24)

Parallelism is also evident in this set of constructions occurring towards the close of the lines :

(i) "so clear" in line 3,
(ii) "so far away" in line 11, and
(iii) "so sweet" in line 23.

In line 1, the antithesis between the phrases "my will" and "my heart" receives emphasis through syntactic equivalence (both the Noun Phrases have similar constituents—a possessive pronoun followed by a noun).

The fequent use of the personal pronouns "my," "thou," "we" and "our" emphasizes the speaker's relationship with the person missed: an intimacy that lends a sense of immediacy to the experience of loss. The repeated use of Noun Phrases beginning with the Possessive Pronoun "our" suggests intimacy and harmony between the "widower" and the lady in question:

(i) "our solace" in line 3,
(ii) "our opposed paths" in line 8, and
(iii) "our banishment" in line 21.

The demonstrative "this" in line 19 ("where now this night is dry,/") gives a further sense of immediacy to the speaker's state of sorrow, suggested by the word "night."

The intimate tone of the address in the following lines lends poignancy to the theme of separation (made inevitable by the beloved's death):

(i) My Very Dear, (line 3)
(ii) But, O my Best, (line 12)

The following Prep. Phrases, functioning as adverbials, are shifted to the start of the lines :

(i) With all my will (in line 1),
(ii) With faint, averted feet. (line 6), and
(iii) In our opposed paths (in line 8).

The phrases achieve emphasis through inversion.

As far as the diction of the poem is concerned, it is chaste and simple, bare of any elaboration. Most of the words are from language in everyday use, including familiar terms of love. A very economical and apt use is made of words with 'poetical' associations: "widowhead," "nursling," "perchance," "bourne," "termless." The poem makes a strong appeal to the reader, conveying the depth and sincerity of the poet's emotions. This is largely to be attributed to Patmore's skilful handling of syntax and vocabulary: the choices he has made at the two levels of verse-structure.

Before we conclude this section, mention must be made about the form Patmore finally decided upon as his literary medium. With his literary development, he came to acquire a symbolic language, involving a consistent use of the nuptial analogy for conveying supersensual truths. The culmination of this development is to be seen in his last published work, *The Rod, The Root and the Flower*. Written in prose, it reveals an important aspect of his style : the habit of saying profound things in the form of aphorisms. Ancient wisdom—based on what Patmore would call "real apprehension" as distinguished from philosophical speculation—has largely come down to us in the aphoristic mode. It seems that Patmore came to look upon this mode as the one most suitable for himself. The prose work mentioned above shows his style to have progressed

towards the aphoristic as his utlimate and inevitable choice. An explanation for this is provided by the poet's biographer, E.J. Oliver, who observes that "Patmore himself, in his last work, had come to the conclusion that disjointed fragments better expressed the highest truths than fine writing."[14] Sudden flashes of intuitive knowledge, got during moments of inspiration, call for a corresponding mode of communication. In the definitive Oxford edition of Patmore's poems (1949), the final section entitled 'Fragments' contains "a number of aphorisms and short sentences, some in verse, some in prose, some in a transition state," as the editor, Frederick page, remarks. The 'Fragments' had remained unpublished at the time of the poet's death. The quality of the 'Fragments' is such that the distinction between the mediums used (verse or prose) does not attract notice. In either form, they embody the great esoteric wisdom Patmore had attained as a mystic. Some of the aphorisms are specially noteworthy for the significance the poet attached to mystic silence :

(i) A song
Loud with the tune which cannot be expressed.
(ii) I am
As one that knows a tune but cannot sing.
(iii) May I know by love and speak by silence.

The above 'Fragments' tell us unmistakably that Patmore was aware of the realm of 'silence.' As is true of many mystical poets, he strove, paradoxically, to articulate this awareness through pithy utterances.

With the help of the examples given, concerning Patmore's use of language in his mystical verse, beginning with *The Angel* and its sequel and ending with the odes, it has been shown how the poet had come to acquire a style of his own appropriate to his needs. The style evident in the later poetry (anticipated in the Preludes of *The Angel*) also links him with the Metaphysicals in a significant way. This, together with the kind of metre he experimented with in the odes, shows that he possesses some of the qualities the moderns look for in poetry: compactness in language, flexibility in metrical structure

(exemplified by the "irregular" odes) and an intellectual subtlety of the kind that distinguished the Metaphysicals.

II

Several of Thompson's admirers in his day were specially impressed by the richness of his vocabulary, his ability to coin and use words in violation of grammatical conventions. His vocabulary provoked hostile criticism too. He, therefore, took pains to avoid in his *New Poems* what had been seen as his linguistic faults in the earlier volume. Despite this, the unfavourable criticism continued. Divergent views regarding the sources of his extensive vocabulary have been advanced.[15] Arthur Symons, offering his views in this regard, denied Thompson a personal style.[16] Reid upholds the same view.

The composition of Thompson's vocabulary reveals a poetic synthesis at work, aiming at a language that would throw "a fresh light on the ancient and universal aspects of the human spirit."[17] Rather eclectic in his approach, he did not merely select words from the stock offered by his contemporaries but drew freely on a much larger source : the language used by his immediate predecessors, Shelley and Keats, the Metaphysicals, notably Crashaw, and the Elizabethans such as Spenser. As we shall attempt to demonstrate through illustrations, he succeeds in bending language to his needs in many poems, in several of them using words, including deviant forms, appropriate to his vision. Largely, his language tends to be remote from ordinary experience. Edmund Wilson's view regarding a poet's attempt "to find, to invent, the special language which will alone be capable of expressing his personality and feelings"[18] is applicable to Thompson's practice. His vast reading provided a rich resource for the "special language" he forged to express his personal vision.

Symons and Reid, who have denied a personal style to Thompson, have attributed this to his 'imitativeness,' to the lack of a poetic principle as they would put it. Imitativeness one certainly comes across in the poet, but it is not as obtrusive or persistent as it is made out to be and, in any case, it does not obscure his own style. This applies as much to his early

poems as to the Pantasaph poems he wrote later under Patmore's inspiration. The argument that he does not have a style of his own or that he did not cultivate one through a disciplined effort, cannot be sustained for two reasons. Firstly, the cultivation of a personal style does not necessarily (and in all cases) depend upon the conscious application of a theory or principle. Every poet or artist does not have a theory to guide and justify his practice. Secondly, it is not quite true that Thompson lacked a poetic principle. He had one though he did not profess it with the rigour and consistency with which Patmore did his. The state of his manuscripts, with words and lines erased at places, belies the suggestion that he wrote carelessly. Influenced, no doubt, by Patmore's maturer opinions, he does not simply echo the elder poet. He was more articulate than Patmore about avoiding a conscious didacticism in art. He believed that the poet must speak indirectly and communicate truths "synthetically" and did not see any fundamental conflict between Beauty and religious piety. Of the beauty pursued by poets he says, "Eye her not askance if she seldom sing directly of religion."[19] He maintained that a poet need not confine himself to specific themes and held further that "poetry and prose can, and sometimes do, play into each other."[20] On the whole, his poetic principle, as we glean it from his prose essays and poetry, is religious in motivation. A poet's duty, he believes, is "to see and restore the divine idea of things to a fallen world."[21] This is consistent with his view of poetic creation as a divine *fiat* as also with his idea of suffering as an important component of the poetic process (discussed in Chapter V). Thompson did not overlook the significance of the discipline that art demands. This is in spite of the inspirational view he seems to take regarding poetic creation in *Sister Songs II* :

> The poet is not lord
> Of the next syllable may come
> With the returning pendulum;
> And what he plans today in song,
> Tomorrow sings it in another tongue (p. 40.)

A more explicit and coherent account of the poetic process is given by him elsewhere :

> The basis of the poetic faculty is neither intuition alone, nor emotion alone . . . The basis of the poetic gift is intellectual insight, or intuition, combined with emotional sensibility. The union is so subtle that the poet may be said in a manner to see *through* his sensitive nature.[22]

The precise quality of the Pantasaph poems, studied in Chapter V and seen to be rich in mystical meaning, confirms the theoretical assumptions underlying the above view. Accordingly, the denial of a poetic principle to Thompson seems to be too extreme an opinion to merit acceptance and cannot be sustained in the light of the facts stated.

Thompson's pronouncements regarding metre are seen by Reid as an echo of what Patmore says in his 'Essay on English Metrical Law.' As we have seen, Patmore practised the catalectic metre, which he recommends in the essay, in his odes. Thompson declares emphatically that he had tried the form of the "irregular" ode in his 'Ode to the Setting Sun' before he saw any of Patmore's work. The metrical accomplishment in this ode confirms Thompson's skill and originality. He was specially drawn to the catelectic metre for the great scope it afforded for variations. Regarding the principle of metrical variation, he observes :

> The true law is that you take a metre (the more received and definite the better) and then vary it by the omission of syllables, leaving the lines so treated to be read into given length by pause and by dwelling on the syllables preceding or following the hiatus. The omission of syllables is the exception not the system of the metre, and the art of the poet is shown in skilfully varying the position and manner of the omissions. In this way the most delightful effects of loving, lingering and delicate modulation on the one hand, or airy dance-like measure and emphasis on the other, may be compassed.[23]

The statement is quite convincing and reveals the poet's grasp of the principle. He followed it in his own poetic practice (as will be demonstrated). It is not without significance that Patmore, on seeing Thompson's verse, made this frank statement :

> I feel a personal and a sort of proprietary interest in the metrical qualities of much of Mr. Thompson's verse.[24]

Personal contact with the elder poet and familiarity with his work must certainly have helped to deepen Thompson's metrical insights further. That he did not confine his practice to the ode-form alone (on which Patmore's metrical accomplishment largely rests) but tried his hand at other forms too, such as the conventional sonnet, the pastoral, blank verse, etc., shows that his metrical knowledge was quite sound.

Beginning our study of select specimens of Thompson's verse with special regard to his use of language (in the manner we approached Patmore's verse), we give below just a few examples of his unusual words and coinages that no reader fails to take notice of :

(i) Adjectives formed from verbs by the addition of the suffix-'less' : quenchless, abashless, rebukeless, repentless, delimitless, shunless;

(ii) Latinisms : illuminous, rubiginous, fuliginous, auxiliatrix, impurpurate;

(iii) Forms ending in '-ed' (used as adjectives) : *globed* clusters, *bared* limbs, *statued* minority, *calyxed* heart, *enchanted* movelessness;

(iv) Adjectives with '-un' as the prefix : unmaternal, uneuphrasied, unleaguerable, unmeet, undelirious, unpetitioned;

(v) Deviant usages : *sunshine* ways (noun used as an adjective), *feat* ways (noun used as an adjective), *wintered* of sunning song (verbal form of the noun 'winter'), *thwart* child (verb used as an adjective);

(vi) Unusual adjectives : *destinate* verse, *conflagrate* fancies, *constellate* dreams, *preparate* worm;

(vii) Adjectives ending in liquid sounds : flexile gracile, roseal;

(viii) Other unusual forms : immitigate, impitiably, labyrinthine, intelligential, reformate, irradiant, immediatably, maenadize (verb from 'meanad');

(ix) Compounds : sunset-heart, rose-chapleted, interparticled, gold-knotted, dove-nuncioed (the frequency of such formations is marked);

(x) Oxymorona : frankly fickle, fickly true, immortal mortal, unlawful lawful wiles, restraint restraintless, traitorous trueness (frequency rather marked).

From the point of view of linguistic simplicity, Thompson's two poems, 'Daisy' and 'The Poppy,' could be singled out from his early poetry as characteristic. The simplicity achieved here anticipated the form towards which he was to progress finally as a stylist. 'Daisy' is free from any linguistic "excess." Its diction is unobtrusively simple, close to life in the country-side and largely objective in reference. The stanza used is an iambic quatrain with a, b, c, d as the rhyme-scheme. The first line and the third are each four feet long and the remaining two are three feet each. Within this measure, however, variations are noticeable : the lines are at places shorter or longer than required by the basic pattern and some lines, such as "Red for the gatherer springs," begin with a stressed syllable, providing instances of accentual inversion. The poem has a high frequency of monosyllabic words as this stanza will illustrate :

She knew not those sweet words she spake,
Nor knew her own sweet way;
But there's never a bird, so sweet a song
Thronged in whose throat that day. (p. 5.)

The expression "big-lipped surprise" in stanza 5 (reproduced below) presents a vivid image; the phrase stands out as an unusual collocation ('big-lipped' as the modifier of 'surprise'), thus pinning down the image. The description of the girl reveals a clarity of definition achieved through the use of simple and precise words :

She listened with big-lipped surprise,
Breast-deep mid flower and spine :
Her skin was like a grape whose veins
Run snow instead of wine. (p. 5.)

The noun "sunshine," used as an adjective in the following verse, is appropriate in its context; it conveys the poet's meaning better than any other epithet would :

She looked a little wistfully,
Then went her sunshine way : (p. 6.)

The diction of 'The Poppy' too is generally simple. The following usages are, however, striking :

(i) *purpurate* (a Latinism used as an adjective),
(ii) *lethargied* with fierce bliss (coined out of the noun 'lethargy'),
(iii) *leaved* rhyme (an adjective related to the plural of the noun 'leaf'),
(iv) *swinked* gipsy (an adjective derived from the verb 'swink', an archaic word).

Against the background of the general linguistic simplicity of the poem, the above deviant forms serve to accentuate what is sought to be conveyed through them. In lines 2—4 of the first stanza, the alliteration and consonance (repetitive use of the consonant /f/) suggest the rapid movement of a flame itself :

Summer set lip to earth's bosom bare,
And left the flushed print in a poppy there :
Like a yawn of fire from the grass it came,
And the fanning wind puffed it to flapping flame. (p. 7.)

The oxymorona in the following verse are appropriate to the behaviour of a child and gain in significance through alliteration :

"O frankly fickle, and fickly true
Do you know what the days will do to you ? (p. 8.)

The diction of the two parts of *Sister Songs* is largely elaborate and ornate. Here and there, however, we find lines which give evidence of the poet's close observation and his controlled use of a language that is precise in reference :

The long, broad grasses underneath
Are warted with rain like a toad's knobbed back; (p. 21.)

The following passage, in particular, affords an extraordinary example of Thompson's descriptive power. The language used is free from any trace of diffuseness or vagueness. Thompson presents his plight accurately and vividly (the external facts of his situation as also the details regarding his psychological condition) :

Once—in that nightmare time which still doth haunt
My dreams, a grim, unbidden visitant—
Forlorn, and faint and stark,
I had endured through watches of the dark
The abashless inquisition of each star,
Yea, was the outcast mark
Of all those heavenly passers' scrutiny;
Stood bound and helplessly
For time to shoot his barbed minutes at me;
Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour
In night's slow-wheeled car;
Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length
From under those dreaded wheels, and, bled of strength,
I waited the inevitable last. (p. 28.)

The deviant epithet "abashless" (derived from the verb 'abash'), used in the line "The abashless inquisition of each star," has its meaning defined and extended by the context in which it occurs. The usage is effective. So is the line "For time to shoot his barbed minutes at me," a fine instance of concentrated language conveying subtleties of thought adequately, the words

used being plain and familiar. Another passage from part II of the poem consists of a long-drawn descriptive simile in which detail is piled on detail and the device of personification used. Though the syntax is elaborate and intricate, the concreteness of the words contributes to the quality of vividness for which this passage is noted :

As an Arab journeyeth
Through a sand of Ayaman,
Lean Thirst, lolling its cracked tongue,
Lagging by his side along;
And a rusty-winged Death
Grating its low flight before,
Casting its ribbed shadows o'er
The blank desert, blank and tan :
He lifts by hap toward where the morning's roots are
His weary stare,—
Sees, although they plashless mutes are,
Set in a silver air
Fountains of gelid shoots are,
Making the day-light fairest fair;
Sees the palm and tamarind
Tangle the tresses of a phantom wind;—
A sight like innocence when one has sinned !
A green and maiden freshness smiling there,
While with unblinking glare
The tawny-hided desert crouches watching her. (p. 36.)

The description gains in effect through the simultaneous devices of contrast and personification : the figures of "Lean Thirst" and "rusty-winged Death" below shown as providing a contrast to the "green and maiden freshness smiling" above. The choice of words is suitable to the details observed, e.g., that of the word "gelid," which does not merely mean 'icy.' Thompson's fidelity to facts enables him to use language to extra-ordinary effect here. We notice deviant use of language at many places in *Sister Songs*. Mention may specially be made of a compound coined : "greening-saphire." The first element "greening" of this compound is a form derived from

the adjective 'green.' As an attribute word fused with the noun "saphire," the second element of the compound, it is far more suggestive than the word 'green.'[25] The line in which it occurs and the lines immediately preceding are reproduced below to indicate the aptness of the coinage :

> With some sweet tenderness they would
> Turn to an amber-clear and glassy gold;
> Or a fine sorrow, lovely to behold,
> Would sweep them as the sun and wind's joined flood
> Sweeps a greening-saphire sea; (p. 24.)

The syntax of *Sister Songs*—of the greater part of the verse--matches the diction in elaborateness. At many places, a somewhat barqque effect is produced when added to these features, the syntax is involved too :

> If Even burst you globed yellow grape
> (Which is the sun to mortals' sealed sight)
> Against her stained mouth;
> Or if white-handed light
> Draw thee yet dripping from the quiet pools,
> Still lucencies and cools,
> Of sleep, which all might mirror constellate dreams;
> Like to the sign which led the Israelite,
> Thy soul, through day or dark,
> A visible brightness on the chosen ark
> Of thy sweet body and pure,
> Shall it assure,
> With auspice large and tutelary gleams,
> Appointed solemn courts, and covenanted streams.'
> (p. 30.)

The loose and involute syntax of these lines accounts for the effect of diffuseness here. The clauses and phrases present images loosely strung together, the result being that the general drift of meaning is not immediately clear. The diction is largely 'poetic' and vague, exemplified by such words as "lucencies," "pools," "tutelary," "covenanted," etc. By and

large, the verse of *Sister Songs* gives evidence of elaborate syntax and a diction that is conspicuously 'poetic.'

Thompson's skill in handling the ode-form was acclaimed by Patmore when he read 'The Hound of Heaven.' The poem, studied at various levels of structure—syntax, sound-pattern and lexis—reveals an extra-ordinary coherence and consistency of pattern. The interpenetration of the three aspects of linguistic structure achieved in the poem has a cumulative effect : it renders the enactment of a spiritual experience possible. The fluctuations marking the rhythm of the lines correspond to the restless movements of the struggling soul chased by the Divine. Variations on the iambic measure used, including those in the shape of accentual inversions at the beginning of lines, are noticed in many lines such as these :

(i) Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!
(ii) Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.
(iii) Naked I wait thy love's uplifted stroke!

The rhymes are not disposed according to any definite scheme. For an idea of the other features let us look at the introductory lines of the poem :

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him and under running laughter
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.' (p. 77.)

In the first three lines, we notice the devices of repetition, parallelism and variation fully exploited. Thus the structure "I fled Him" (SVO pattern) occurs in all the three lines. In the first line it is followed by two conjoined prepositional phrases—"down the nights" and "down the days," (acting as adverbials) in which the NP constituents "the nights" and "the days" are antithetical to each other (an instance of contrast at the lexical level). The prepositional phrase "down the arches of the years" in the second line also has the same preposition "down" as its initial element but its NP constituent is structured differently : it contains an NP ("the arches") followed by "of the years," a prepositional phrase (Prep.+NP) which modifies it. In the third line, the Prep. phrase "down the labyrinthine ways" presents a variation on the pattern of the corresponding Prep. phrases in the first two lines. Its NP constituent is different from "the nights," "the days," "the arches," "the years" ('Determiner+Noun' pattern) in having an additional vocabulary item, the unusual adjective "labyrinthine," as its constituent ('Det.+Adj.+Noun' pattern). Thus at the level of syntax, we notice a subtle patterning : parallelism accompanied by variations, reproducing the pattern we noticed at the metrical level : variations on the iambic measure. This is how syntax and sound-pattern interplay within the over-all pattern of the poem. The lexical item "labyrinthine" is a deviant form coined by the poet. It shot into currency after his death and today nobody would describe its usage as 'illegitimate.' All the other words in the line in which it occurs are monosyllabic. Thus, in the context of the words immediately preceding and following it, it acquires prominence not only through its unusual form but through its length too. It stands out as a key-word in the poem in relation to the theme of pursuit. The following two adjectives, in lines 5 and 7, are mutually similar in form as coinages :

(i) *vistaed* hopes,
(ii) *chasmed* fears.

Their unusual form also serves to heighten the significance of the divine chase in respect of the hopes and fears that deter-

mine the oscillations [of the pursued soul. The repetition of /t/ in line 7 ("And shot, precipitated,") is onomatopoeic, reinforcing the soul's sense of an impending fall from grace. The deviant form "hearted" gives prominence to the image presented here :

> I pleaded outlaw-wise,
> By many a hearted casement, curtained red, (p. 77.)

The two adjectives "unhurrying" and "unperturbed," sharing the same derivational prefix 'un-,' illustrate how the device of parallelism helps to reinforce the link between words at the level of meaning (the lexical content of the two words being otherwise also more or less similar).

The above instances have served to illustrate parallelisms and variations (deviations from the general pattern) as the features noticeable in the poem at the metrical, syntactic and lexical levels. The correspondence between these features at various levels of structure, or what may be described as the interpenetration of these levels, explains how the enactment of a profoundly religious experience has been achieved so well in the poem.

Apart from Thompson's use of 'unusual' words or words involving deviations from grammar, we come across another feature in his verse occasionally—the association of words denoting severally the sensations of seeing and hearing. This too may strike the reader as a kind of linguistic incongruity. Labelled as "colour-hearing," it represents what is understood today as a case of synaesthesia. It is a feature that claims attention specially when one is engaged in a study of imagery. Here is an instance of this in Thompson's 'Ode to the Setting Sun' :

> Thy visible music-blasts make deaf the sky,
> Thy cymbals clang to fire the Occident, (p. 83.)

Another instance is given from 'Of Nature : Laud and Plaint' :

Jocund of heart in darkness; to be taught
Once more the daisy's tale,
And hear each sun-smote butter cup clang bold,
A beaten gong of gold; (pp. 258-59.)

Edith Sitwell likewise uses a synaesthetic image in one of her poems, associating the verb 'bray' with the noun 'light.' Synaesthesia characterizes a perception close to the mystical. The mystic's account of Reality often suggests that his apprehension of it involves an interpenetration of the senses. Judged from this angle, the instances of "colour-hearing" in Thompson's verse, necessitating a 'distortion' of language at the level of logic, illustrate an important aspect of his visionary perception.

Obvious deviations from the norms alone do not distinguish Thompson's style. He achieves distinctiveness as a stylist also while he conforms to the norms of linguistic simplicity. We shall pay attention to three of his poems which are good illustrations of this : 'Arab Love-Song,' 'A Fallen Yew' and 'To a Snow-flake.' The language of these poems is free from any ornateness or vagueness. At all the levels of structure, we do not come across intricacy or involvedness of any sort in them. In 'Arab Love-Song,' the syntactic structure, if not uniformly simple, is by no means elaborate either. What is striking is the parallelism we notice in the structure of these Noun Phrases :

(i) "the hunched camels of the night,"
(ii) "the bright and silver waters of the moon"
(Here actually we have two NPs conjoined),
(iii) "The maiden of the morn,"
(iv) "Light of my drak,"
(v) "blood of my heart, and
(vi) "the red pavilion of my heart."

In all these NPs, the head-word is followed by a structure modifying it—a Prep. Phrase. The head-word is either preceded by a determiner, or a determiner and a pre-Head modifier,

or by none (as in the NP "light of my dark"). The NP constituents of two Prep. Phrases are "my dark" and "my heart"; they are similar in structure, sharing a common element in the shape of the possessive pronoun 'my.' The other NPs are simpler in structure, involving no Pre-Head modification (that we noticed in the NPs listed above) :

(i) "thy father," (occurs twice)
(ii) "thy mother" (-do-),
(iii) "thy brother" (-do-), and
(iv) "thy tribe."

What is sought to be shown through this look at the syntactic pattern of the NPs is how within the parallelisms variation is introduced to avoid monotony, that might result from too much of uniformity. In these lines of the last stanza a repetitive pattern is built around imperative constructions :

Leave thy father, leave thy mother
And thy brother;
Leave the black tents of thy tribe apart! (p. 111.)

The pattern accommodates variety too, provided by the syntactic structure of the third line above. We have further a pattern of variety presented by the two questions at the end of the poem (a 'Yes/No' type followed by a 'Wh' type) :

Am I not thy father and thy brother,
And thy mother ?
And thou what needest with thy tribe's black tents
Who hast the red pavilion of my heart ? (p. 111.)

The vocabulary of the poem is very simple. The rhyme-scheme varies from stanza to stanza; we notice variation in the length of the lines too. Variation on the iambic measure is, as usual, seen in the shape of accentual inversion in several lines with the initial syllables accented. For example :

Leave thy father, leave thy mother

Most of the words used are monsosyllabic. With all these features, the poem serves as a fine example of how a complex pattern of meaning can be spun out of simple materials.

'A Fallen Yew' is a poem of extra-ordinary power which it owes, in no small measure, to Thompson's linguistic precision and clarity. The description of the fallen tree is vivid and exact in detail, showing that the thing described has been carefully and closely watched by the poet, as these stanzas would show :

> When doom puffed out the stars, we might have said,
> It would decline its heavy head,
> And see the world to bed.
>
> For this firm yew did from the vassal leas,
> And rain and air, its tributaries,
> Its revenues increase,
> And levy impost on the golden sun,
> Take the blind years as they might run,
> And no fate seek or shun.
>
> But now our yew is strook, is fallen—yea,
> Hacked like dull wood of every day
> To this and that, men say. (p. 118.)

In the latter stanzas of the poem, there is a switch from description to a chain of subtle reflections on vital issues concerning the inner spiritual history of each soul. Here again, Thompson uses words concrete and suggestive enough to render the reflections easily graspable :

> The sweetest wife on sweetest marriage-day,
> Their souls at grapple in mid-way,
> Sweet to her sweet may say :
> 'I take you to my inmost heart, my true!'
> Ah, fool! but there is one heart you
> Shall never take him to!
>
> The hold that falls not when the town is got,
> The heart's heart, whose immured plot
> Hath keys yourself keep not!

> Its ports you cannot burst—you are withstood—
> For him that to your listening blood
> Sends precepts as he would. (pp. 119-20.)

The poem has a tautness that could only result from a controlled use of language. This in turn must be attributed to the poet's grasp of the self-hood of the tree and his sure awareness of its impact on his feelings (conveyed best by Hopkin's terms, "inscape" and "instress"). Some 'unusualness' continues to mark Thompson's lexical choices : "fjords" "strook," "saddendly," "pulseless "consortress," "unleaguerable" and "obliette." These words, however, fit well in their contexts.

'To a Snow-flake' is a poem almost unapproachable in its technical merit. With something akin to the miniaturist craft, the poet gives a vivid picture of the snow-flake, weaving round it an aura of mystery that suggests the unseen. The choice of vocabulary is appropriate, a good proportion of words being drawn from the 'register' of workmanship itself: (i) "filigree," (ii) "fashioned," (iii) "metal," (iv) "silver," (v) "graver," (vi) "hammered," (vii) "wrought," (viii) "shaper," (ix) Insculped" and (x) "embossed." The entire set comprises words sharing 'concreteness' as their lexical feature. All suggest the various phases of the process of shaping a precious little ornament. The other categories of words are:

(a) "snowflake," "wind," "frost"—words having reference to the natural world;
(b) "paradisal," "imagineless," "purely"—words suggesting the transcendental.

As far as syntax is concerned, the poem consists of short sentences made up of tightly knit structures. The repeated use of adverbials with the same derivational ending "ly", creates an effect of emphasis serving to illuminate the meaning of the poem. These are the pairs of adverbials we come across : fragilely, surely; purely, palely; tinily, surely; mightily, frailly. They serve to heighten the sense of mystery associated with the snowflake. The internal rhyme between the adverbials of each pair, and the occurrence of some of the adverbials at the ends of lines, intensify this effect further. The lines of the

verse, though generally short, are of varying length. The rhyme-scheme does not have a definite pattern—there are six rhymes not disposed systematically. The occurrence of 'Wh' type questions in the poem—there are two such questions addressed to the snowflake—introduces an element of rhetoric, which adds a still further touch of mystery to the shaping of the snowflake. Finally, the two words "imagineless" and "surmisal" (the latter matching the pattern of the word "devisal" in the poem), which are Thompson's coinages, fit excellently into the general pattern of the vocabulary and contribute their share of meaning without being obtrusive.

A poetic 'distortion' of language is generally seen to take two forms—(i) deviations from the rules of grammar (at the levels of syntax and lexis), and (ii) violations of the logical structure (despite conformity to grammar). The above illustrations of Thompson's use of poetic language have shown that he often resorts to grammatical deviations. When handled skilfully with a sense of proportion, a deviant use of language can help a poet suggest experiences of the mystical, being of an order different from the ordinary. Several of the deviant forms used by Thompson in some of his mystical verse, as demonstrated, illustrate this quality. Examples of the second kind of poetic 'distortion' of language are available largely in the use of paradox; "most of the language of lovers" and also "most of the language of religion"[26] derive special power from this linguistic device. Paradoxical statements such as "In my end is my beginning" (one comes across many of them in Eliot's *Four Quartets*) do not violate rules of grammar in any way; they only run counter to ordinary logic. It is relevant here to refer to Ian T. Ramsey's perceptive view of religious language as one "in search of a situation" [beyond the pale of normal logic] which, as such, will either "be logically odd" or may "contain significant tautologies."[27] Winifred Nowottny, while affirming Ramsey's view in the essentials, makes a significant observation:

> When one attaches the language to the right sort of situation, or constructs the situation such language demands as its explanation, the language will ring true. The peculiarity

> and violence of the language forces us to look for or imagine a situation capable of calling such language into being.[28]

The key-passage (St. XX) in 'The Mistress of Vision,' which we discussed in Chapter V, may again be referred to here as an example of the language of religion charged with paradoxes:

> 'Pierce thy heart to find the key;
> With thee take
> Only what none else would keep;
> Learn to dream when thou dost wake;
> Learn to wake when thou dost sleep;
> Learn to water joy with tears,
> Learn from fears to vanquish fears,
> To hope, for thou dar'st not despair,
> Exult, for that thou dar'st not grieve;
> Plough thou the rock until it bear;
> Know, for thou else couldst not believe;
> Die, for none other way canst live.
> When earth and heaven lay down their veil,
> And that apocalypse turns thee pale;
> When thy seeing blindeth thee
> To what thy fellow-mortals see;
> When their sight to thee is sightless;
> Their living, death; their light, most lightless;
> Search no more—
> Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore.'
>
> (pp. 155-56.)

When mystics address paradoxical language of this kind to the initiate, they prescribe a technique that would enable the latter to negotiate the steps of the 'ladder of contemplation.' The passage quoted above is logically "odd" and marked by the kind of "violence" which is productive in calling up a "situation" that transcends logic. It is interesting to see that the vocabulary of the passage is very direct, simple and clear while the logical structure is "odd." Though the 'meaning' cannot be made explicit, the general drift of the passage can be apprehended. In fact, the significance of the above lines does not

lie in what they say immediately, but in what they actually *do*. They awaken perception, making the addressee see oddness in what passes for the normal and seek the truth in the reverse direction. It is the impact the lines have on us that determines their value, the stated meaning being hardly articulate. The mystical meaning is gradually unfolded as one ponders the passage. The imperative constructions such as "pierce thy heart to find the key" used throughout, help to reinforce the insistent note on the value of asceticism the paradoxes are concerned with.

One signal achievement of Thompson's, as far as his command of the poetic skills appropriate to his vision is concerned, must also be mentioned. It relates to his skill in handling the pause in the poem 'Contemplation.' Here he is thoroughly successful in using the catalectic metre with Patmore's ease and precision. The pauses seem to mark the intervals of intense absorption in the poet's meditation on Nature. The accents and pauses together reproduce the inward movements and fluctuations of the soul engaged in contemplation. The reposeful movement of the following lines suggests the peace and quiet the poet finds in the natural scene :

> The river has not any care (8)
> Its passionless water to the sea to bear; (11)
> The leaves have brown content; (6)
> The wall to me has freshness like a scent (10)
> And takes half-animate the air, (8)
> Making one life with its green moss and stain; (10)
> And life with all things seems too perfect blent (10)
> For anything of life to be aware. (10)
> The very shades on hill, and tree, and plain, (10)
> Where they have fallen doze, and where they doze amain.
> (12) (p. 158)

The number of syllables per line (indicated above in parenthesis against each line) varies from 6 to 12, correspondingly the catelexis allowed ranging from 10 to 4 syllables per line (the time taken up by the pause). Two of the lines carry an initial stress, on the words 'Making' and 'Where' respectively provid-

ing instances of accentual inversion (a variation on the iambic measure). The diction is unobtrusive and simple and the syntax too is free from any deviation. These features, in combination with the metrical quality of the verse, contribute to the poem's excellence.

We shall now examine some of the linguistic features of the poem 'In No Strange Land' to see why it merits attention as a very good example of mystical verse, as maintained in Chapter V. Here is the introductory stanza:

> O world invisible, we view thee,
> O world intangible, we touch thee,
> O world unknowable, we know thee,
> Inapprehensible, we clutch thee! (p. 293.)

First of all, what we notice here is a repeated use of paradoxes. Of the six words in each of the first three lines, five are monosyllabic. In the fourth line, three out of the four words are also monosyllabic. There is a polysyllabic word in each of the four lines; the word acquires prominence because of its length. The four words, thus standing out conspicuously in the verse, are the adjectives "invisible," "intangible," "unknowable" and "Inapprehensible." Together they fall into a pattern. As "attributes of negative theology,"[29] these Latin derivatives stress the transcendental qualities of the spiritual realm. They do not connote anything substantial; they are charged with an evocative power that can induce a spiritual effort for 'illumination.' The placing of the attribute word in each of the three lines after the word "world," the noun qualified, is an instance of inversion. The inversion lends further prominence to the words and makes the invocation ring true and natural, letting the accent fall on the right syllable as demanded by the basic iambic metre.

Again, the device of parallelism, at the level of syntax, is fully exploited in the stanza under examination. This is seen in the similarity of constructions and the repetition of words used. Thus we have two types of constructions, "O World invisible" and "we view thee" in the first line. The pattern is maintained in the second and third lines. The three lines present

a pattern of syntax as much as a pattern of sound, making thus a nice interplay of "silent music"[30] and sound possible. The fourth line presents a variation on (and partially conforms to) the pattern: here we have the attribute word "Inapprehensible" without the initial words "O" and "world".

The diction of the poem, on the whole, is as simple as the syntax. The two compounds "clay-shuttered" and "many-splendoured" in stanzas III and IV respectively are poetically effective coinages: they present concrete and vivid images and justify and illustrate Thompson's creative use of language. Another coinage is the word "enstranged" in the verse " 'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,/ That miss the many-splendoured thing." As a novel form, the word arrests our attention, thus intensifying the feeling that is sought to be conveyed through it: of the state of our spiritual alienation resulting from our inability to use our powers of perception rightly.

Thompson's ecclesiastical poems, such as the 'Orient Ode,' in which the poet makes use of terms drawn from Catholic theology, pose difficulties to the reader not aware of the exact connotations of these terms. The religious symbolism underlying these poems, providing the key to their mystical meaning, cannot at once be grasped. And when to this is also added, as in some other poems, a diction marked by violence, the meaning is further obscured. On the other hand, those of Thompson's mystical poems whose diction is relatively simple claim our attention better, the underlying symbolism being invariably not difficult to grasp. Such diction easily accommodates the terms of negative theology we noticed in 'In No Strange Land,' for example. These terms are of universal application rather than of strict relevance to a particular creed and, therefore, are generally comprehensible. From the point of view of style, it is the relatively simple poems of Thompson, involving mystical themes, that represent the poet at his best. "Impressed by certain styles" no doubt, the essential Thompson is to be seen in his shorter and simpler poems where his meaning is clear and the mysticism unmistakable. Even among his early poems, there are some ('Daisy' for example) which show the poet to advantage in terms of their simplicity and freedom from "excess." The Pantasaph poems, written under Patmore's

influence, reveal care exercised in the selection of language. At any rate, in the poems which are more characteristic of Thompson as a *mystical* poet, he is content with saying things in plain language, at the same time making an effective use of his ability to bend language to his needs, as our analysis of some of these poems in this chapter has established. It is here that he makes his mark as a stylist in his own right.

NOTES

1 Coventry Patmore, "Francis Thompson : A New Poet," *Fortnightly Review* (1894), pp. 19-24.

2 Quoted in *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. xxxi.

3 *Studies in Phonetics and Linguistics* (London: O.U.P, 1965), pp. 20-21.

4 *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, pp. xxxii-xxxiii. See also John Heath Stubbs, *The Darkling Plain* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950), p. 136.

5 *The Language of Modern Poetry* (London: Andre Deutch, 1976), p. 45.

6 See "Patmore and Hopkins : Sense and Nonsense in English Prosody," *The London Mercury*, 38 (1937), pp. 217-24.

7 Quoted in Frederick Page, *Patmore*, p. 164.

8 *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore*, p. 268.

9 Norman Greenhalg, "Coventry Patmore: A Mid-Victorian Minor," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 172 Part I (1947), p. 55.

10 *The Real Robert Louis Stevonson & Other Critical Essays*, p. 20.

11 Quoted from the *Academy*, 28 April 1877 in Frederick Page, *Patmore*, p. 159.

12 The syntactic structure of these two lines is given below symbolically:

NP+Conj.+NP+Prep.+NP+Prep.+NP

13 The poem reminds us, incidentally, of Donne's exploitation of similar syntactic devices, 'Wh' questions and 'If' constructions, in 'The Canonization,' where, however, the context is different: the lover's plea to prove the sacredness of what is profane in the eyes of the world.

14 *Coventry Patmore* (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd., 1956), p. 168.

15 Thus F.B. Tolles asserts that Thompshn's vocabularly is traceable to Rossetti, Patmore and Alice Meynell. He dismisses the suggestion that the poet is in any way connected with the Metaphysicals as far as his language is concerned. See "The Praetorian Coherts: A Study of the language of Francis Thompson's poetry." *English Studies* (Amsterdam), 22, No. 2 (1940), 49-64. On the other hand, G.A.

Beacock, in his doctoral dissertation (1912) tracks down the sources of Thompson's vocabulary to the sixteenth and seventeenth century writers, Paımore, etc.

16 He maintains that Thompson imitiates both Patmore and Crashaw and, in the process, fails to achieve a style at all. See his *Dramatis Personae* (1923; rpt. New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), pp. 166-67.

17 Paul Van K. Thomson, p. 220.

18 *Axel's Castle* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 21.

19 *Shelley*, p. 21.

20 *The Real Robert Louis Stevenson & Other Critical Essays*, p. 234.

21 Paul Van K. Thompson, p. 234.

22 *The Real Robert Louis Stevenson & Other Critical Essays*, p. 235.

23 Quoted from the letter dated 18 July 1892 the poet wrote to Katherine Tynan. See *Poems of Thompson*, p. 308.

24 *Courage in Politics & Other Essays*, ed. Frederick Page (1921; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968, p. 161.

25 We may refer, in this connection, to a parallel use of the word 'green' as a verb dy Allen Tate in his poem (about an idiot boy) mentioned by Donuld Davie. See his *Articulate Energy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 146.

26 Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 13.

27 *Religious Language* (1957; London: *SCM* Press Ltd., 1969), pp. 37-40 and p. 119.

28 *The Language Poets Use* (London: The Athlone Press, 1962), p. 186.

29 Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language*, p. 50.

30 Donald Davie, *Articulate Energy*, p. 29.

CONCLUSION

Through this study we sought to define and characterize mysticism in literature with particular reference to the poetry of Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson. We noticed a striking similarity in the views expressed by the two poets regarding mysticism; both attached considerable value to imagery and symbolism as the only means of conveying mystical truths. Also, both saw a close connection between Sanctity and Song and, therefore, considered the roles of the seer and the poet as complementary. This similarity of outlook can largely be attributed to the common sources of their religious and literary inspiration. There are affinities between Patmore and Thompson as mystical poets too, but the divergences are more marked. In both, however, the mysticism is religious in motive and inspiration overtly Christian in reference but not without a universal bearing. As we have seen, it assumes two forms--immanent and transcendental. In Patmore, the former type is pronounced though in the religious odes he is explicitly concerned with transcendental themes. In Thompson, both types of mysticism are well represented.

Both Patmore and Thompson maintained that the meaning of the Christian truths was germinally present in the Pagan myths. This perception is reflected in their glorification of Nature. Patmore's attitude to human love is distinct from Thompson's. For the elder poet, married love has a sacramental significance : it foreshadows the love between God and the soul. Accordingly, the image of nuptial love is all-pervasive in his poetry and his mysticism insistently erotic. In investing images of wedded love with mystical significance, he is only following the tradition of the 'Song of Songs' as amplified further in the works of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa. For Thompson, however, married love has no value in itself; it is important to the extent it symbolizes divine love. His

poems of mystical love rarely make use of the spousal analogy while he often seizes upon the relation of the child to its parent (more frequently the mother) to convey his devotional attitude to the Divine. The themes in his mystical poetry, as also the forms in which they are rendered, present a variety we do not come across in Patmore.

Patmore's poems afford evidence of the Purgative and Illuminative stages of the Mystic Way, his final disposition in favour of silent contemplation holding a promise of the Unitive experience. Thompson's poetry bears definite marks of the Purgative stage, lit up with flashes of Illumination. In a handful of his poems, the Illuminative stage is unmistakably suggested. Both Patmore and Thompson were influenced by the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. Patmore's poetry bears an impress of these poets in a greater degree than Thompson's. As mystical poets, the two complement each other; taken together, their poems exemplify Christian mysticism in its varied forms.

It is worth mentioning here that the Indian reader is well-equipped culturally to respond to the mystical poetry of Patmore and Thompson. Though this poetry is rooted in the Christian tradition, it does not seem alien to his sensibility. He has a rich mystical tradition of his own going back to the Vedic times, which later absorbed the influencc of the Sufi mystics. Indian mystical literature, which has had a steady growth over centuries in a land noted for its cultural diversity, comprehends a wide range of approaches to Reality. The Upanishads in the distant background provide many hints regarding these approaches; for example, there are clear suggestions given about Nature mysticism in *Chandogya Upanishad.* It is thus understandable why the Indian student highly enjoys and appreciates Wordsworth's poetry : he looks upon the mystic unity of the spirit of Nature and that of man, which is an important theme of his poetry, as an authentic experience. The *Gita*, which is characteristically a theistic Hindu scripture, mentions throughout the three well-known ways of approach to Reality—*Karma*, *Bhakti* and *Jnana*. They correspond to the types of spiritual life respectively termed practical, devotional and philosophical mysticism by Christian scholars. As regards

the theme of human love transfiguring into divine love, it found its adequate poetical treatment and development in India in the later literature devoted to Krishna and the Gopis; our Bhakti poets have written their finest poems on this theme. A student familiar with this literature will surely respond, both warmly and intelligently, to the mystical poetry of Patmore, which is notable for blending the erotic and the divine. Likewise, the devotional poetry of Thompson, with its accent on humility, renunciation and the spirit of surrender to the divine (approached as the Christ or Holy Mother), will suggest to him comparisons with Bhakti literature. He should read both Patmore and Thompson profitably to explore a variety of comparative literary contexts.

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